[illegible]

[illegible]

by Ellen Mathers

[illegible]

[illegible]

5-7

#241690

A MAN OF TO-DAY.

A MAN OF TO-DAY.

A Novel.

Gallanty

BY

HELEN MATHERS,

AUTHOR OF

"COMIN' THRO' THE RYE," "SAM'S SWEETHEART,"
"MY LADY GREEN SLEEVES," "CHERRY RIPE!"
"STORY OF A SIN," ETC., ETC.

"What will you have?" quoth God.
"Pay for it and take it."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
F. V. WHITE & Co.,
14, BEDFORD STREET, STRAND, W.C.
1894.

PRINTED BY
KELLY AND CO. LIMITED, 182, 183 AND 184, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.
AND MIDDLE MILL, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

D-12
M427A
v.1
Sp Coll

TO THE MEMORY OF

MY DEAR AND HONORED FRIEND

MORELL MACKENZIE.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Duke University Libraries

http://www.archive.org/details/manoftodaynovel01math

CONTENTS.

BOOK I.—THE APPLE.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	... ...	1
II.	... ...	31
III.	... ...	46
IV.	... ...	64
V.	... ...	82
VI.	... ...	111
VII.	... ...	125
VIII.	... ...	136
IX.	... ...	153
X.	... ...	162
XI.	... ...	199
XII.	... ...	218

A MAN OF TO-DAY.

Book I.—The Apple.

CHAPTER I.

"She was as red as flower in May,
Or snow that snoweth on winter's day."

EVERYBODY at Penroses was dressing for church—dressing too with that eye to effect which only the seventh day properly inspires in the female breast, and which originated undoubtedly in that of our innocent mother Eve. For you may be sure that when, on the day above mentioned, she had modishly arranged her decidedly summer raiment, an instinct even older than herself made her look round for the "other woman," to be

crushed by her superior grace, and that, however much Adam may have admired her, she felt him to be but a poor substitute for that intelligent, if unwilling, approval, only to be furnished by her own sex. Our wittiest actress roundly asserts that the Serpent was a dressmaker, for that if Eve had not eaten the apple, she would not have required clothes, and if women did not wear clothes, they would not have dressmakers' bills; *ergo* the Serpent, otherwise the dressmaker, is solely to blame for women getting into debt. And indeed I think Eve came off uncommonly ill in that little business all round. How was *she* to know when she offered a nice, juicy fruit to a man, most certainly with a view to his enjoyment, that he would be sneak enough to turn round (when it disagreed with him) and say: "*She* beguiled me, and I did eat"? Why did he not put up with the disagreeable results of eating it, and let it be supposed he had gathered it himself? Eve would have

been quite justified in flatly contradicting the mean tell-tale, but then she would not have been a woman if she had not taken all the blame on her own shoulders, and let the man go free. Her descendants do it to this day—but they won't to-morrow. And her conduct on that occasion is just one of those things that make me proud of my own sex, just as Adam's meanness is a smudge on the whole race of man.

And so everybody save the Chief, from the Ancient Mariner down to Nan (who wrestled with an ugly bonnet and wept at the unbecomingness thereof), was making the best of the face on her or him; and a sense of flurry that seemed yet to blend naturally with the peaceful church bells reigned supreme through the house.

The Whipper-Snapper had tried on all his own and Dinkie's waistcoats in turn (with some regretful thoughts thrown to his father's, which were too big), and he felt it a trial

when at a critical stage of his operations, Nan appeared, looking rather worse than usual, enquiring piteously: "Do I look so *very* bad, Snappy dear?"

It is to be feared that poor Nan, who on six days of the week was more or less wicked, but on the seventh merely vain, got an affirmative reply, for it was a tragic face that she finally carried to the hall where the Denison family was wont to assemble before starting for church, only to be greeted with:

"Good Heavens, child! Where did you get that cocked-up hat? and where's your mother?" added the Chief with such acerbity that immediately all eyes were anxiously turned to the staircase, but in vain.

Mrs. Denison was always a little late; it was one of those small luxuries well within the latitude of a really good woman that she comfortably allowed herself, though to Tom unpunctuality comprised all the sins of the Decalogue, and now he muttered something

inaudible, snatched the hand of the youngest child present, and set out, the procession falling in decorously behind him.

If he had made the town, his eldest daughter half filled the church, and Tom glanced round with a sardonic twist of the nose as he made his way to the square pew under the pulpit, round which was spread a distinctly male population, through which Easter sent a ripple of life as she passed.

I suppose we are all born greedy, and when we see deeds done we would have liked to do, and people we would have liked to be, we look at and enjoy them, as if the deeds were our very own, and the people our very selves.

Talk about the feast of reason, and the flow of soul, it is the feast of colour, and the flowing line of beauty that men really worship and revel in. It is to please his own eyes that a man looks at a lovely thing, not to give pleasure to what he gazes on. The pleasure

is for himself, and he desires to share it with none, but will let time stand still, and duty go to rack and ruin, while he satisfies that craving of his nature for the beautiful, which imperiously cries out for satisfaction even at the cost of all he holds most dear. And God who gives colour to one flower, yet denying it sweetness, bestows both lavishly on another, grants to some few fortunate women that which makes them joys to every soul who approaches them—and such an one was Easter.

When Tom had quarrelled with his foot-stool, fallen foul of his book-mark, asked Nan in a fierce whisper what she was garping at, and levelled a furious glance at his newly-arrived wife that fell harmless on her pink crêpe bonnet (Maria was a woman whom church became), also let the tail of the sheet-lightning in his eye expend itself on the local grocer, who was peeping at the great man through his fingers, he felt better, and pre-

sently glanced complacently round, much as a Turk might on a seraglio that reflected credit upon his taste.

Nan had snuggled close up to Easter with hat askew, and eyes alight, Dinkie and the Snapper in all their Sunday bravery were divided by Melons, who had already detected certain stolen splendours in her favourite brother's attire, the French and English governesses were divided by Bunkulorum, and round Mrs. Denison the little ones clustered thick. She would have liked to put weights on their soft golden heads and keep them as her own little loving children always, for all too well she knew how fast they grew up into selfish, cock-sure boys and girls, who knew everything their parents are not expected to understand, but this also she did *not* know, that the only thing that will bring them back, with the hearts of little children, to their mothers, is to be alone among strangers, or in a strange land, and to lean

back and find the arm and the love that has supported them, withdrawn.

Mrs. Denison would cheerfully have submitted to be cut into pieces for any one of her children, only she would have insisted on the larger pieces being for the benefit of the boys, while Tom preferred his girls, though he was angry with Easter just now, for he could count at least a dozen new popinjays round his pew. Bring up your child, and love and tend her through long years, and then when the first young man she fancies, calls to her, and hey, presto! away she goes, can you wonder that a father's heart is made sore by such ingratitude? I don't think a mother ever feels quite the same over such things—she usually keeps her daughter all her life. Frequently her son-in-law wishes she didn't.

Woman is an affectionate animal—she can't live without something to look after—she has actually been known to love a man—when

she has no children. And Maria put the children first—and Tom leagues after. Now this is wrong, because, though I admit that *little* children are far more interesting and lovable than any contradictious man can ever be, yet it is the law of Nature that the young life goes out into the world and forgets, and the old life stays at home, and remembers. Therefore should husband and wife be friends, for they will be left alone face to face, mutually dependent on each other by the once noisy and crowded hearth at last.

I fear it is a tradition in most families that the person who has to keep order is a bogie. The mother usually slides easily enough into the position of guardian angel to the ungrateful young brats (it is a position that nearly every woman fills with grace, and intense satisfaction to herself), and tacitly admits tyranny in the father where often there is no tyranny at all, but only an earnest desire for the children's real welfare. All of

which is obviously unfair to the head of the family, who usually works hard to keep them, while they completely overlook the comforts he provides, in finding fault with his temper. A child flees naturally to a mother's petticoat, if it be the merest rag even, but it very seldom takes shelter behind a man's coat-tails, and never if the rag be handy. And for my part, I am sorry for the poor old dad, who seldom gets a chance of winning his children's affection till they are grown up, and then it is sometimes too late, for the mother pulls the wires, and can set the child jumping away from, or towards the father, just as she pleases. It is undoubtedly this feeling of injustice, of outraged affection, that provokes many a father into severities of which he would not otherwise be guilty, and when he is constantly expected to explode, why, if you expect a man to do a thing, and let him *see* that you expect it, he usually gratifies you by doing it, and

going one better than you thought him good for.

And there is this misfortune, that ever the father can dive down into his own memory as a child, and see in what lamentable fashion he failed to his parents, but the child does not know, and only crudely judges the parent by those acts which must sometimes be faultily human, and therefore from the child's inflexible stand-point — inflexible because it can't see the possibility of change—wrong in an elder. Any way, it came to pass that Tom Denison was regarded as something of a tyrant both at home and abroad, while it had been tersely said of him in the hunting-field, where he was conspicuously well known, that he was in the habit of kicking his men servants, and kissing his maids, also that he owned the best horses, the finest cellar, and the handsomest daughter in the county.

And if the former impeachment were true, you may be quite sure that the men richly

deserved it, and that the maids were of altogether uncommon good looks. On one occasion, I know that he forgot himself, but not of set purpose ; he fell indeed the victim of a delicious opportunity. It was at the Works one morning, when everything, from his family at home, down to the pertest factory girl, had driven him wild, that it occurred to his foreman, a man well on in years and respectability, to stoop down and tie his shoe lace right in Mr. Denison's path. The temptation was irresistible, the opportunity unique. Mr. Denison promptly, and with much good sense, kicked his servant soundly, thereby probably saving himself from a fit of apoplexy, or worse. The old servant did not retaliate. He rose, and said with deep feeling and great dignity: "Mr. Denison, sir, I'm ashamed of 'ee, and I wouldn't have *thought* it of 'ee," and marched stiffly away. It did not occur to him that possibly Mr. Denison had not thought it of himself either.

Jem Burghersh's pew was under the reading-desk on the other side of the aisle, and across it the young man looked at Hugon, who, beside Easter, showed like a dim and sad silhouette of the past, as contrasted with a vivid, prismatic to-day.

For a moment the tired blue eyes, and the grey ones, so full of vigorous life and purpose, questioned each other. And it struck Jem then, that there is no more pitiful, sorrowful sight, than faded, *young* blue eyes. They were meant for love, and laughter, and sunshine, and they have found only tears and disillusion. Of the black and brown, we expect work-a-day things, but the blue—when sunken and weary—touch us with an inexplicable pain and pity.

Jem thought "Poor little woman!" as he looked away, which was not precisely the way in which any one who really knew Hugon would describe her, and it might have surprised him to know the manner

in which she was just then apostrophising *him*.

"You are a good sort," she said to herself, "just enough brains to keep you from being a fool, and just the man to be gentle to a woman, and take care of her—yes, and forgive her too, if needs were. To be sure you have made the fatal mistake of going down on your knees at the beginning, and when you want to get up again, probably Easter won't let you. Yet there's a curve about your moustache that flatly contradicts the gentleness of your manners. Odd that a man who should be at his very best when he is love-making, is usually at his very worst, and arouses a woman's strongest contempt when it is absolutely vital that he should compel her to look up to, and own him master—as if he kept his very worst for her, his best for the world. Your masterful man is your indifferent lover—none the worse for the woman perhaps in the end—but if in love,

men were calm, self-reliant, holding their own as they do in crowds, or when together, instead of which, when really and profoundly in love," she paused, and a burning memory whitened her cheeks, " they are like children who beg and cry, and pray, for something to please—us? No, themselves. When they master their selfish cries and prayers, when they have learned to go hungry, they master us. Still it is the *métier* of the Briton to be steadfast, of the Russian to be distinguished—and dangerous. I wonder what our friend is doing now? If he has courage, or is sufficiently in love, he will follow her here; I'm sure of the courage, but I doubt the love."

Nan had forgotten her unbecoming bonnet, and because incongruous ideas always came into her head, she was wondering why there should be so many people walking and sitting about the world, and so few lying flat in graveyards? And people take so much

more room lying down, than standing upright, with just enough room in great cities for feet to fight on, and people have gone on being born, and dying, for thousands and thousands of years, yet the churchyards are so few that they are scarcely to be seen as specks on Nature's broad breast, and the living give us neither elbow space, or breathing room. Where do they hide themselves away, the poor tired-out dead — do their bodies indeed vanish even as rapidly as our memories of them?

And then Nan stopped thinking, to look, as everyone else was looking, at a suddenly opening door beneath the organ loft, through which, in a blinding burst of sunshine, came a young man, who advanced boldly up the aisle, his eyes searching the congregation on either side of him, until he found what he wanted, when he coolly turned in at the nearest pew, taking the only vacant seat — which hap-

pened to be next to Daddy Gardner—that was there.

Mr. Denison looked sharply at his daughter, but she lifted the little black fan she carried in her hand, and hid her face completely. This stranger might be staying in the neighbourhood—and it was a common enough thing for young men to journey miles over and back just to see Miss Denison at church, but this was by no means a common young man, and by way of passing on his discomfort, Tom smartly touched the foot of Nan who was leaning forward, all her soul in her eyes, and eager interest stamped upon her every feature.

"*Les beaux esprits se rencontrent*," and it was at her that the stranger was looking—not at Easter — caught by the absolute sincerity and truth of the little ugly face under its ugly hat; for this man rated sincerity high above every other precious quality on earth, above even loyalty.

"*Excuse* me," said Daddy in a politely infuriated whisper, "but you are sitting on my hat."

It was only the brim, but the new comer smiled slightly as he removed himself, and took in all the noble army of Easter's lovers, before he looked across at Easter's now uncovered face, carelessly, keenly, but there are men's looks—and looks.

Jem's glance revealed Easter to herself in a misty halo of divinity, Basil Strokoff's stripped her clean to her bones—which were ugly and unbecoming, and she hated him for doing it. And it was delightful to her to feel that she could be angry—not flurried, not glad, but simply angry. Indeed, after that first heart-leap which greeted his unexpected appearance, Easter sat tight, and behaved as if no such person as Basil were present, whereby Tom was partly deceived, but not quite.

Nan felt drawn to the man in spite of herself, and fascinated, though she did not in

the least know why. He was different to anything she had ever seen before in her life, the glance of his eyes went through her, and when he looked at Easter, the child thrilled as if it were herself he loved, and who must and did love him, for of course he had come here after Easter.

The villagers looked at him hard, rested their hands on their knees, and breathed harder still. He wore a coat, waistcoat, tie and so on, just like other men. In what then did he, or his clothes differ from many other young men present? Even these yokels recognised the power—though they knew not the name of, Style—that quality which will make one man well-dressed in a rag, while without it another is mean in cloth of gold. As to what the rural *beaux* thought of him—well, they thought principally of their tailors, and reviled them, all except Jem, who was not wholly unacquainted with Poole.

And looking at Easter, Basil acknowledged

that her clothes too, were all right—and a woman's clothes mean so much more than herself; an ill-dressed head, a veil awry, will make her appear a very derelict of fate, while attired *à quatre èpingles*, her heart may be broken, and ruin have overtaken her—but no one will know, or believe it. Thus Basil appreciated the fitness of the gauzy frock and hat that matched Easter's hair and eyes, a sable background against which her skin showed up like the white and rose of azaleas, satiny fine, vividly pure as they—nay, purer, for what shall compare with the infinite possibilities of beautiful *young* blood? And best of all was the eager look that only a young face ever wears, with the light of the rising sun upon it, not that over which the day (however good) has passed.

Hugon had looked at him openly, as at a face that she knew, her glance indeed was almost equivalent to a bow, and expressly intended for Tom's observation. He had been

delighted with Hugon hitherto, but now his eye suggested that she had come to Penroses without credentials, and that he had never once heard her speak of her father and mother. She nodded to him slightly as one who says, "Bye-and-bye," then plunged into her Prayer book with its scarlet cross, and shut her senses to the trembling of Easter's knees on the hassock that touched her own.

Perhaps the new comer did not fall in so readily with the downsittings, and uprisings of his neighbours as he might have done. Twenty years had been bridged in a moment's space—it was just so long, since he had been in a country church, yet, if he had been set here deaf and blindfold, the atmosphere must have told him what day it was, and among what manner of people he found himself.

He listened intently to the singing of old hymns that he remembered, for though his father was a Russian, he had been born and

brought up in England, and as a child had sometimes accompanied his English mother to church.

"O! Paradise! O! Paradise, the world is growing old," sang the lusty young voices and the quivering old ones; but it is no such thing, the world is as young as ever, it is only we who grow old and stale, and cease from enjoyment, for as if in defiance of such teaching, through the door he had opened, and that no one else had shut, one could see the slanting tombstones, and hear the rooks calling sleepily to each other in the oak trees overhead, while little vagrant airs suggesting new-mown grass, and running water stole to and fro among the warm, half-sleeping elders of the congregation, and everywhere the quiver of young restless life made itself felt, that youth to which rest means stagnation, and sleep is one of the useless conditions, not joys of existence.

When the sermon began, Basil glanced

round the church. The square pews showed Conservatism, for as a Radical is known by the evilness of his hat, and the misdirected energy of his manners, so is the true Conservative recognised by the comfort, not to say elegance of his surroundings, and it did not take Basil Strokoff long to discover that the principal person present (in the town's estimation) was Mr. Denison, and that half the prosperity there to-day flowed directly from him, since only a man who owned half the town could afford to unbutton his waistcoat, or with closed eyes make wry faces when the ladylike Vicar made outrageous demands on the common sense, not to say purses of his congregation.

Nothing escaped this young man, who took in every phase of Rokehorne life as here represented. He labelled correctly enough the doctor, lawyer, tradesman, poor man, and black sheep penitent o' Sundays, and the rest; while the existence that Easter must

necessarily live in such a place moved symmetrically before him in a panorama which contained among other less useful figures the dominant one of Jem Burghersh. True his back was to that young man—still, he had observed him, and even found time to note a young woman heavily swathed in crape, of whom he thought: "She looks like a Suttee, and will marry again to-morrow, if she gets a chance."

The sermon was a missionary one. Will anything ever teach us not to interfere with other folks' religions, older by uncounted thousands of years than our own? It is as unjustifiable as meddling with another person's pockets, and upon my word, when the missionaries get eaten, I say: "Serve them right." And I always thought that the pith of the whole expedition, ay, and the pathos of it, too, lay in that one solitary little Bible which I once saw exhibited as the sole relic of Mungo Park's expedition. The

savages could not eat that—no, nor its spirit, which is indestructible.

And now the sermon had droned itself to a close, and by way of relief, during the collection, the congregation sang with a will. Basil knew the tune, which was cheerful, though with none of the chirrupy, lirrupy song and prayer combined, peculiar to the Salvation Army, and which seems at one and the same time to satisfy the mirthful desires of human nature, while evincing a very lively fear of God. It is not everybody who can set his piety to a dance tune, but those who can and do, are undoubtedly happy and wise.

Gradually a strange feeling stole over Basil that possibly our greatest joys are those of reminiscence—of things that, lying a long, long way back in our memories, steal upon us softly, like old friends sure of a welcome, . . . but when the collecting plate was brought him, he shook his head in stern

negative, at the same moment as on the opposite side of the aisle, Mr. Denison, likewise invited, angrily shook his. Perhaps each saw the action of the other, and their mutual hatred of humbug established a *point d'appui* between them, and made many impossible things possible, afterwards.

The two opposite pew-doors flew open simultaneously, and Basil Strokoff found himself close to Hugon (who alone of all those present he had been unable to classify), and she bowed gravely and formally to the young man, to Basil's immense surprise. Mr. Denison snatched Easter's hand, and hustled her away, while the French governess, moving abreast of the Russian, said in a low voice:

"You are coming to call? When?"

He shook his head.

"Then why are you here?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I have friends at Fitzwalters," he said.

"I took this on my road. There is some good gudgeon-fishing here," I am told.

Their eyes met, and Hugon smiled. He remained grave. Then the crowd pushed them divergent ways—they melted rather than parted into the surrounding throng.

Hugon hurried, and overtook Mr. Denison outside the church door. He was fuming, and muttering something about "fellows," when she joined him.

"I stopped to speak to Mr. Strokoff, an old friend," she said, with a certain hard calmness. "He may call upon me, I suppose?"

"What is he doing here?" snapped Mr. Denison.

"He has friends at Fitzwalters——"

"And a pretty set they are over there," said Mr. Denison, shooting a withering glance at Easter, but her face told no tales.

"Pray, miss," he said, "do *you* know him too?"

"I never spoke to him in my life, father," said Easter, truly enough, but with a haste for which fear was mainly responsible.

Just behind, Mrs. Denison might be heard remarking with real enjoyment on the deliciousness of the air, and it was a remarkable fact that whenever his wife most acutely felt the beauties of nature, it was invariably at a moment when Tom's natural irascibility was increased by business, or family, or personal worries.

"Confound the air!" cried Tom, as he shot ahead, and Hugon, left face to face with Easter, smiled.

"It was unavoidable. I saved a scandal by seeming to recognise him, for he gave you away by the manner in which he walked up the aisle, and sat down opposite you. And Mr. Denison strikes me as a person who could make himself—unpleasant on occasion."

"I don't understand you," said Easter indignantly; "at Fairmile you moved heaven

and earth to keep Basil Strokoff and me apart, and now you are throwing me at his head—and I won't be thrown. If he *does* call, I shall be out."

"Calm yourself. He is on his way to Fitzwalters. He is merely paying you—a morning call."

"How *dare* he?" cried Easter, clenching her slender hand with those tears in her eyes that mean temper in the young, "O! if he were really in love with me, *I'd* teach him a lesson he'd never forget!"

Hugon laughed as they turned in at Penroses.

"He has been teaching women lessons all his life," she said in Easter's ear, as they went up the wide, shallow stairs, "and I don't believe the woman is born who will ever teach him—anything new. But 'buck up,' as Dinkie says—in these days of nervous, lady-like young men, and manly women, you may congratulate yourself on attracting, if but for

a moment, two such real masculine personalities as Jem Burghersh and Basil Strokoff. Though of course it's the page upside down that we all want to read, and we pass the blackboard with the writing chalked up—nose in the air—still, the blackboard's safest."

"And dull. I'm tired of blackboards," said Easter with decision, as she tossed her hat with its nodding black plumes on her bed.

CHAPTER II.

"Of pleasures those which occur most rarely give the greatest delight."

—Epictetus.

It was so early that only the birds were abroad, pattering with light feet on the silvered sheet of lawn that lay before Penroses, for the sun had not yet dispersed the dew, and is not four o'clock of a deepest summer morning, the stillest, the divinest, the most exquisite hour out of all the twenty-four that a lordly August day and night may think fit to squander on us?

Nature does not awaken in the same fashion as her last, and most unhappily-made creation, man—with a stretch, a groan, and usually a longing to relapse again into the nothingness of slumber, and so evade the responsibilities of waking life. She appears

fresh, smiling, trim—all her forces in admirable working order, and has always at least an hour or so to herself, in which to enjoy her own company, before that biped, misnamed lord of all, struts upon the scene.

It is then that like a queen apart she reigns in her own beauty, and will scarcely deign to share it with you, even if you rise betimes to catch her, but is always a little far-off and chilly in her greeting, making you feel how insignificant you are, and how great she is—mysterious too, as if still touched with the secrets and the silence of the night.

Her flowers will not greet you with a warm breath of voluptuous sweetness as you pass them by—cold in their breasts will lie the dew, and they will yield but a rarefied clean fragrance as you lay them to your lips, asking if indeed but yesterday they were warmed through and through by a scorching mid-day sun? Austerely as strangers they look you in the face, as if marvelling that you linger

near, and your hands hesitate to pluck them; for vaguely you feel that your presence is an intrusion, and that nature was holier and more beautiful without you,

> "For beast and bird have seen and heard
> That which man knoweth not."

Wherefore, put thy shoes from off thy feet if thou wouldst enter in with a chance of welcome from her, or read her intimate heart; forget that thou art human, and remember only that the great Unknown, who breathed into life all this loveliness about thee, made thee also, and that dust indeed thou mayest proudly be, if all this earthly beauty be fashioned out of dust, calling to us in kinship with a thousand voices to which a thousand chords in us respond, and reminding us that when we crumble to earth again, we shall live again as a part of the glory of the Universe.

> "There lives and breathes
> A soul in all things,
> And that soul is God."

And what better can we ask than to live on among what we *know*—to spring in the spear of grass, to breathe in the flower, to steal out into the sunshine in all the exultant freshness of the young leaf, and to throb and tingle with life, warm in the mother breast from which we sprang? "O! not for us," we cry, "to waken in some far-off alien place, among chilly joys that we may not taste with human lips, understand with human hearts, where we may not even have the human creatures near us who made our heaven upon earth, for is it not written that there all human ties are broken?"

Moreover, if to dust we come, then for us there can be no lasting stain of sin, for the impersonality of nature must be apparent even to the lightest observer. The foulest crime, the utmost human corruption, leaves no mark on our Earth-mother's stainless perfection; rather her leaves fall over, and hide it, the south wind scatters even its

memory, and straightway Nature has done with, has forgiven, and forgotten it. Man may grow old and vile, but the youth of the earth is the same yesterday, now and for ever, and makes you *know* the imperishability of God.

Nothing was lost on Hugon as she moved, not a tint of the sky, or sharp touch of *aigre-doux* in the air, or the feel and the sparkle of the crisp dew beneath her feet; she even seemed to hear the white trumpet flowers, and their blue-eyed sisters shouting their welcome to the dawn, yet at the bottom of all she was intensely conscious of that wretched *Ego*, which dwarfed the very vault of Heaven and the floor of earth, to a puddle just large enough to hold her own frightful reflection.

"What does it matter?" she said to herself, scornfully, and looking up to the pale sky, rarefied as if a mighty pure breath had hurried before the sun, and winnowed all

the heavens against his coming, sweeping imperiously away the old day and the night, to make room for the new. "Why am I not asleep too, like those animals in the house behind me? They were born asleep—they will live and die asleep; there is only one waking soul among them, the red-headed child, and when they die, they will only continue their present existence of rust, rust, rust. Is there not time enough to sleep when we die? Let us work while we have the light . . . 'In the darkness no man can work'—what does that mean but *death*—not sleep, but death?"

She stopped thinking to listen to the *Zee-zee* of the tit-lark, shrilly clear among other reed-like notes, fine and sweet as are all bird voices above human utterances. What do they not know, these tiny creatures with deathless spirits that are never to be tamed or bought of men? They tell us of what we know not, and make us know them also . . . of how the dawn comes up,

of what the song means in running water, of the source of sunshine, and the mystery of the fragrance of turf and blossom; of what the west wind rustling through long grass breathes in whispers, they being indeed God's interpreters between Him and us.

A horse was resting his nose on the top of the gate leading into the orchard, and looking at the garden as if thoroughly enjoying himself, till he saw, and shied away from her as an intruder.

"You are awake of course," said Hugon, who thoroughly knew and hated human nature, but loved animals, thus obeying a natural law. "You live a temperate, clean, hard-working existence, and don't know the meaning of self-indulgence, yet when one man wants to say the most degrading thing possible of another, he calls him a beast. A beast? What is it? What harm is there in one? It has

healthy instincts, a healthy body, and when it dies, we can eat it without fear. Who could eat one of us? An animal indeed! One healthy beast is worth a thousand diseased humans. A man finds it too much trouble to get out of his chair to serve you—a dog, comfortably couched, leaps up if you do but look at him—it is all willing service, willing heart, and limbs, and eyes—where will you find a man so patient, so docile, so affectionate, so absolutely devoted to you as your dog? I envy you, oh beasts, and would be one of you—for we should do no wrong, if we did not *know* it to be wrong, and —you have the sweet of slumber, while of the curse of memory you are blessedly free. You go on producing beautiful, healthy offspring, while man alone is the author of those miserable beings, that the false conditions of life, and mental trouble, cause unhappy woman to bring forth."

The current of her thoughts changed.

"I wonder what you mean," she said, looking across to the belt of trees behind which at the "Royal George," Basil Strokoff was presumably sleeping. "You are a man, and you take what you like, and when you like, and how you like—you don't live the one phase of life a woman does—with her heart; you live with heart, and brain, and body—in a word, with the whole physical and spiritual man. O! yes, you live—and no good woman ever *lives*. It is a sip here, a snippet there, a taste given you for hunger, an ache developed where there was no ache before, but it is not the whole ripe, rich fruit, to be enjoyed through and through, that you take so unthankfully—you must be a woman first if you want to appreciate being a man."

She pushed open the gate, and crossed the stubble that the dew touched so much less beautifully than the smooth turf of the garden, and came presently to the long

apple tree colonnade, that ran parallel with the "George" cabbage garden and strawberry beds. Early as the hour was, Hugon perceived a man's figure on the other side, and she smiled as he turned towards her. Across the ditch their eyes met, and he glanced questioningly at her hand, as if he expected it to hold a *billet-doux*.

"Won't you come over?" she said.

He leaped the ditch at a place made convenient by Easter's "boys," and strolled beside her.

"I love these morning hours," she said. "Nature with her eyes wide open—man with his fast shut."

"The only thing is," he said languidly, "that it is apt to make one a Pharisee—to extol oneself at the expense of one's neighbours—in itself a very bad exercise for anybody. And who knows but that the very persons whose slumbers we despise, may not later in the day do something infinitely

better than our best thoughts have been, however early we got up to think them? By-the-way," he added, "I like that little girl I saw in church yesterday—I don't know her name."

"So you noticed Nan," said Hugon, "which is unusual. Miss Easter is the sweet-briar of the family; do you know that if you put a twig of it among a bunch of flowers, it kills all the rest?"

"Why did she not answer my letters?" enquired the young man, as if the subject interested him very little.

"And if she had, probably you would not be here," said Hugon.

He laughed, and his laugh was exhilarating. It was impossible not to observe how delightfully the morning suited him, and he the morning.

"Can one in all the place get away from Penroses?" he said; "it seems to me that the whole town has been sacrificed to Mr. Denison's

gardens, and hot-houses, and graperies, and orchards, and meadows. He is in trade, is he not?"

"Yes. Do you know what trade means? It means morals, taste, education, health, travel, independence—everything in short that makes life worth living, instead of merely lingering. Only one ought to begin poor, or one does not get the best value for one's money."

"Everyone," said Basil, "should be allowed two lives here below—one in which to learn how to enjoy himself, and the other in which to enjoy it."

"A man might," said Hugon, "but a woman, never. She would take her every thought and memory of the one life into the other, and spoil it. A man keeps his memories in his cigarette case—a woman carries hers about with her in trunks, and never loses them. I don't think a man has enough to fill a trunk."

"Is not that the little girl I liked so much?"

Hugon turned. It was Nan, sure enough, who had been abroad under the hedgerows, and far afield for hours, and now came timidly over the grass laden with wild flowers, and stockings down at heel, looking, if possible, more disreputable than ever.

Basil's manner changed altogether as he went to meet her, seeing only the eager welcome in the child's eyes as she hastened towards him.

"How do you do?" said Nan politely, for as Dinkie said, she could be extremely well-behaved on occasion (only the occasion rarely lasted very long). "Shall I make you a nosegay?"

And while she made it, Basil and she talked together, and Hugon, quite out of it, and murmuring something about wet feet, moved away.

They were very simple things of which the

man and child talked, as they crossed the stubble together. Yet before they parted, Nan had timidly confided to him that she meant to write a great book some day, so that her family might be proud, and not ashamed of her.

"Then do your work now, while you are young, child," he said sadly. "Never believe anyone who tells you that the fruit of experience is best. Do it while you are enthusiastic—full of hopes and ideals, with unbroken health, and heart, and unflagging spirits — it will be worth reading then, and brighten many a soul. God knows we've got enough wretches to preach the gospel of despair to us already"— and he thrust further out of sight the volume of Pouschkine that peeped from his pocket.

But as they neared the house by way of the stables, lively fears of her father obtruded themselves on Nan's enjoyment, and presently

she stopped short, and looked at Basil very earnestly.

"You mustn't come any further," she said; "if the Chief sees you, he'll kick you."

"I shall sit down," said Basil.

"You see it's on account of Easter," said Nan. "Everybody is in love with her! Are you?"

"Well, I'm blowed," cut in Dinkie's voice, in a fierce aside from the adjacent wash-house window; "if *you're* going to be gooseberry-in-chief, please say so, and I'll——"

"I shall come and call this afternoon," said Basil; "mind you look out for me, child. Good-bye."

CHAPTER III.

"What we ought not to do, we should not even think of doing."

—EPICTETUS.

MR. DENISON'S acquaintance with his neighbours was of the most superficial character, while his hospitality was not unlike that of the Tezzanese whose religion enjoins them to practise hospitality, and who therefore always eat with *shut doors*. Tom abhorred provincial society, and lived to please himself—and occasionally other people. If the county did not want him, he most assuredly did not want the county, and kept his independence in a way that no man trained to polite fiction in conversation can. He was fond of recording how, when on one occasion, Maria mentioned to a caller "The Mill on the Floss" as her favourite work, and George Eliot as her

favourite author, she was met by the crushing rejoinder: "Oh! *she* was Nobody, *she was a Unitarian.*"

And so it came to pass that when Basil stormed the front door at Penroses, seldom used save on Sundays, he was kept waiting so long, that had he not been a resolute man he would probably have turned round and driven off to Fitzwalters, but when at last Sweet William admitted him to one of the many satisfactory rooms at Penroses, he immediately discovered that Mr. Denison was a man of taste who, while never setting himself up to be a judge, yet possessed the quality of selection to an extraordinary degree, so that there was nothing in his house (saving and excepting the room known as the pig-sty) that anyone could have possibly improved upon, or wished otherwise.

Pictures were meant to hang up, and china to sit down, he said, so he made his walls rich with that splendour of colouring which

good pictures alone can give, and kept the best china in pantry cupboards, so that it was only by accident in later years that the children discovered they had always eaten their gooseberry-fool out of Crown Derby cups without handles, and smashed a few dozen in the eating.

Basil passed a quarter of an hour very comfortably with the pictures, then went to the window and looked out, thinking that one might pass his existence pleasantly enough at Penroses, if one had never chanced to live the life of the town. For the most part healthy people do not want, and do not miss, excitement, which is really only a disease of the nerves, and with good health, sufficient occupation, and surrounded by those we love, any vague yearning for change may be quickly stifled, but once bitten by that insane rage for one's species that herds men and women together in masses till the air is thick with their struggling breath, so that they

come to prey like wild beasts on one another, you can never go back to the still calm joys that once contented you, and may thank God if you do not become fevered with that desire, death to all honesty of thought, and good work, of outstripping, not excelling, your forbears in the race for life.

Basil waited, but nobody came—not even Nan, whom he especially wished to see. He had merely asked for the ladies. The open window beckoned him, and he stepped out.

To the right of the house, an ivy-covered wall, masked by rhododendrons, shut off a variety of out-houses and stables that he already knew, and attracted by a distant sound of voices, Basil passed through a little door in it, emerging on a cobble-stoned enclosure which led in turn to a courtyard warm with the smell of horses, and lively with the barking of dogs, and inconsequent cackle of cocks and hens.

High above these, from what looked like a

disused coachman's house, issued William's meek voice in accents of entreaty, to which a fresh, enjoying young female soprano lifted itself in pert reply.

"I hear. It's the '*Roosian* gent'. Why don't you go and tell your missus?"

"Missus is in the kitchen garden, miss, with cook," said William, "seeing about the pickles, and can't come"—which was a lie, for with the usual sympathy of the lower classes for a love affair he had been searching for Easter only.—"You'll excuse me, miss, but I think he's come to see *you*."

"Then say I've gone out for the day," said Easter.

"I understood him, miss, to ask me to fetch you," said William, mendaciously, mindful of future tips, for Basil's elegance had sunk deep into his soul.

"Then tell him I'm cleaning out the fowl-house, and can't be disturbed. So I am—ain't I, Daddy?"

"Of course, and I'm helping you," said a masculine voice with great authority.

"And so am I," struck in another, "only don't tell him that, the beggar might want to come out and help, you know."

"Then say I'm sitting in the ice house, William, trying to get cool. Just fancy, Reggy, someone in the street put a boiler up, and when the Chief went to look for his ice the other day there was—nothing! He simply danced, and his language was—like the boiler. Where's my preserved citron? Now then, Daddy, don't you frighten that hen. When those eggs are chickens, they're mine, and I'm going to sell 'em. I want a new frock. William! Isn't that idiot *gone*?"

"Yes, miss," said a voice faintly. And then there was a sort of scuffle below stairs, and a sound of retreating footsteps across the gravel.

"Boys," said Easter, in muffled tones that suggested her mouth was full, "which hen do

you bet gets her chicks out first, the Cochin China or the black Hamburg?"

"It's like his infernal cheek," growled Daddy Gardner, "poking his nose in at Penroses; we don't want any blooming Nihilists *here*. And I think, Miss Easter," he added, insinuatingly, "you mentioned that you had never spoken to him in your life before?"

"I never have," said Easter, in the tone that signifies an unwilling blush.

"And, of course, you don't want to," said Daddy, with youthful indiscretion. "Haven't you got *us*?—and what do you want more?"

"Y-e-s."

Easter's voice sounded flat; for the time, at least, all the *vim* seemed to have gone out of her. She put up her hands to loosen the white silk handkerchief tied round her head, and at the same moment a quick decided step sounded on the stair.

"The Chief!" she exclaimed, turning pale; "hide, boys, hide!"

The two broad-shouldered young men looked comprehensively and wildly around them.

"The cupboard won't hold one of us, much less two," whispered Daddy, breathlessly; "it was an awfully tight fit last year——"

"It isn't the Chief," said Easter, listening intently; "it's a *new* step—then" (stiffening at a dreadful thought) "I do believe it is——"

She darted into the adjacent cupboard, and drew the dusty door close, just as Basil appeared on the stairway, looking as entirely at his ease as he always managed to do, whether in a palace or a hovel, and glancing enquiringly at the two flurried and angry young men. In his hand he held a hat that had been crushed into a silk accordion by a spiteful blow that the ceiling had come down to hit him on the stairs, but he appeared quite unconscious of the disaster as——

"Miss Denison?" he said, gravely.

"You have the advantage of us, sir," said Reggy, with extreme bucolic hauteur, "this is

the hen-house, and Miss Denison, as you see, is——"

At that moment came from the cupboard a small, distinctly feminine sneeze. Feminine, because it suggested anger, laughter, timorousness, defiance—all combined in a way quite impossible to be expressed by any male organ, and while the young men turned scarlet, Basil smiled.

"I never heard a hen sneeze quite like that before," he said, and made a step forward as if to investigate such a natural curiosity, but Daddy, gobbling like a turkey-cock, threw himself between.

"Sir," he said, "I thought a gentleman never intruded on the privacy of a lady—a hen, sir, I mean—and if you'll come downstairs, *we* will look for Miss Denison, and let her know you are here."

"Certainly," said Basil, who had not the slightest intention of pressing the point, when at that moment the cupboard door groaned,

opened, and Miss Easter Denison walked lightly and unconcernedly out.

That he had never really seen her before, or had forgotten her, that was Basil's first impression as she faced him, laughing, the ebon silk of her hair showing under the white, twisted kerchief, the rose-tints of her dimpled cheeks and lips catching all his senses, as it were, in a swift surprise . . . for there is this about real beauty, that it strikes you like a strong man armed, and you cannot, if you will, say him nay.

"How do you do?" she said, but without holding out her hand, possibly because it hid a half-eaten candy. "I thought I heard my name mentioned. . . ."

Her glance sank from his face to his telescoped hat. She struggled with herself for a moment, looked helplessly at Daddy and Reggy, then being all young, all healthy, and all without rancour, they burst out into a simultaneous fit of laughter that cleared the

air of explosives, and for the time being made them friends.

"Mother is in the kitchen garden seeing to the pickles," she said, as she led the way downstairs. "I—I hope the cobble-stones won't hurt your feet," and she looked down at his boots, as if they were patent leather—and he a fop, in a way that was cruelly unfair.

Neither could he hinder her from opening the door in the wall for him, and, obeying her evident wish, as he usually obeyed all women's, passed through, only to find when it swung to behind him, that he was alone. He retraced his steps, but the yard was empty, though a door close by moved slightly, and from behind it came a soft giggle, school-girlish, thoughtless, and only saved from sheer vulgarity by its naturalness, and pure glee. That was the worst of Penroses, it was not built for matters of a private nature, as there was a door ajar everywhere, and

always with somebody very much alive behind it, as Dinkie had demonstrated that morning.

Basil smiled, and decided not to try conclusions with Easter's stalwart body-guard, while she herself, peeping through a chink, was thinking that a man who could walk bareheaded, and carry a concertina hat without looking a fool, most assuredly never had been, or could be, one. It even struck her that he might have worn it without looking ridiculous—and possibly she recognised a subtlety that had counselled him to pay a disrespectful visit in the most orthodox and respectful attire possible.

"She is full of sport," he said to himself, as he went in search of Mrs. Denison, while from the upper wash-house windows, Easter admired his back, and upset the boys' tempers by telling them that the man who did not know how to choose a necktie, was not fit to live.

Maria, who prided herself on her pickles, and was now selecting with care her vegetables for the process, received the young Russian with some trepidation, but in less than five minutes had forgotten Tom, and after a prolonged and most agreeable saunter round the premises (Basil made a point of always leaving a woman on better terms with herself than he found her), lost her head so completely as actually to invite him in to tea. This meal was always served in the Pig-sty, which was Tom's comprehensive name for an apartment through which the whole family life flowed with a vigour, and it must be added, a litter, that defied all attempts at respectability, and of which he had long ago washed his hands, with some allusion, only understanded of Bunkulorum, to the purging of the Augean stables.

Dinkie's fishing-net lay in one corner, the girls' dress-stand stood in another; a canary shrieked above Maria's sewing-machine, while

a squirrel gaily worked his wheel at the rate of a mile a minute on the mantel-shelf, and red-papered, shabby, cosy, looking out on the humours of the town street, it was the most frequented, as it was the most popular apartment in the house. Tom occasionally took his tea and toast there, instead of in the stately solitude of the Green-room, knowing, poor man, that he was a damper on the festivities, and a muffler on those clapper-tongues, yet still, so great is sometimes a man's yearning for company, even when he knows himself unwelcome, that he came. If only he should take it into his head to come to-day!

Maria fidgeted and looked uneasy when she had seated herself behind the tea-pot, that looked like the mother of a large family, but as the table filled up, she took heart of grace, and made tea with that excellent method which is not to be acquired by anything save long experience, and for extremely large numbers.

Nan came in dejected, but colored up brilliantly at sight of their guest. But for Dinkie, who had thoughtfully sandwiched himself between the governesses on the humane principle of keeping a boa-constrictor and a rabbit apart, she would have sat down in the place beside him so conspicuously left empty, and across which Basil and Hugon had some desultory talk about Fairmile—and gudgeon fishing.

Tea was half-over when Easter rushed in, wearing a clean white gown, her black hair neatly snooded with scarlet, and without a glance at anybody, made for the only empty chair, and helped herself to toast and butter as if she were starving.

"I'm awfully sorry to be late, mother," she said, spreading her toast with an emancipated school-girl's lavish hand, "but I stopped such a long time in the washhouse to see what would happen—if only the Chief could have seen him swelling down his lawn!

And O! his hat! Fancy paying an afternoon call on *us* in a blue frock coat, and a *tile!*"

A dead silence, coupled with a heavy and well-meant kick under the table from Dinkie made her blood curdle. What if, as once before, she had overlooked the Chief in those uncounted numbers around? Her alarmed gaze swept the table, and came to a full stop at her next door neighbour, who was just then eating soda-cake as if it were the only thing in life worth doing thoroughly.

There is a legend that a very shy man who stuttered greatly, escorted a charming woman into dinner, to whom for some time he did not trust himself to speak. Then he took heart and said: "Who—who is—that sp—p—potted man over there?"

"That is my husband," she said smiling.

"O—h! and is—is he sp—p—potted *all over?*" responded the stutterer with the courage of despair.

It was possibly in emulation of this worthy,

that Easter, meeting the laughing sunshine of Basil's blue eyes full, enquired gravely :

"Do you like your cake *with* soda, or without?"

Before he could reply to the question, or Dinkie draw in the cheeks that he had blown out in admiration of her "nerve," the door opened, and Mr. Denison, who for once followed, and did not precede a silence, walked in.

Poor Maria rattled the teacups nervously, as Tom's quick eye took in the interloper, but before his glance of surprise could change into a scowl of angry dismissal, Hugon had started up, and effected an introduction in such fashion, that, short of turning his daughter's guest into the street, he must make some sort of greeting to her friend.

And by the time Mr. Denison had drunk half a cup of tea, and eaten a piece of toast, assiduously and tremblingly buttered by Melons, the two men found themselves talk-

ing horses, and if that noble beast has the peculiar privilege of making rogues of all who approach him from a business point of view, he assuredly makes them bosom friends for the time being. And when Mr. Denison found a man who suited him, and who was, like himself, a sportsman to the backbone, he was not the sort of person to let fears for the female part of his family make him abjure such pleasant company, so that it was with something said about "a quiet dinner to-morrow" (overheard, as all things were overheard at Penroses), that an hour or so later after a saunter round the stables, the two men amicably parted.

"Hugon," said Easter with conviction, "I do believe you are Satan himself!"

"No, call me Mrs. Satan. Because she knew every one of *his* tricks—and all her own besides."

CHAPTER IV.

"From the 'dim dawn of history,' and from the innermost depths of every soul, the face of our Father Man looks out upon us with the fire of eternal youth in his eyes, and says, 'Before Jehovah was, I am!'"

It must not for a moment be supposed that because a stranger had dropped in for a morning call at Penroses and stayed, that the family life stood still on his account, or ploughed for itself new channels, quite the contrary indeed—for it went on just as usual. If it could assimilate such a riddle as Hugon without accident, it could support a Strokoff with serenity, and storm and shine alternated with its usual regularity in the domestic atmosphere, where it was a recognised fact that when Tom was expansive, Maria was nippy-like, and the other way round, so that nobody ever got ruined by over praise, or

cockered up into the useless belief that life is all beer and skittles—except to the wicked.

Nan still spent her time regularly between bust-ups and repentances, for even Basil could not rule her life otherwise. Easter divided her thoughts pretty equally between frills (that she loved), and lovers (whom she did not love.) Dinkie vainly tried to combine billiards, and the loose delights of the "town" with punctuality at meal times; Bunkulorum had occasional back-slidings in the direction of snails, and upward flights into the regions of imagination, while Peggy, aged ten, was detected receiving love-letters from Dicky Langdon, aged eleven. It had been discovered by accident, as most guilty secrets are, and perched on a high chair at the family tea-table, poor Peggy was duly indicted, and having had the very inmost recesses of her heart rudely invaded, received the ironical congratulations of her brothers and sisters on the unrivalled

potency of her charms. All of this Peggy bore with a very tolerable stomach, being seasoned to the amenities of family life, but when Dinkie took up the cudgels on her behalf, loudly enquiring *why* the little blue-eyed, red-nosed charmer should not have a sweetheart all to herself, and love-letters of her very own, especially with such an example in the family as she constantly had before her eyes, Peggy burst into an agony of tears, and scrambling down from her high chair, fled, while Maria, after promptly boxing the ears of all who were not too old to be boxed, hurried off to administer comfort to her darling, a careful silence being ever afterwards observed by all parties concerned on the subject.

There were no "ructions" as Dinkie had greedily anticipated between the only two men who were granted the front-door entrance of Penroses. When Basil came across Jem, which was pretty often, the two met in

a thoroughly friendly spirit, that in some odd way curiously exasperated Easter, whose mind just then was more a puzzle to her than if it had belonged to somebody else, for everybody seemed to be in love with Basil save herself. Even Dinkie, after studying him closely, making an exhaustive examination of his clothes, and candidly informing that gentleman it must be "the way he put 'em on, as they were cut pretty much like other people's," had formally announced the Muscovite as emphatically of the "right sort," and extended to him the hand of friendship.

And Basil and Mr. Denison, who had begun well, became the firmest of friends, and often the Russian would go down to the factories, would stand in the midst of the hum and the whirr of machinery, and feel his pulses go quicker, and his heart faster, as if from himself radiated those throbbing arteries of steel—and at such moments, like a fierce breath of life in his nostrils, he

would feel that work was good, and his own perpetual leisure a thing without salt and savour. His elegant figure became a familiar one at the works, moving among the whirling looms, or in the engine-room, watching the iron shafts and wheels revolving, insensible to the infernal heat and smell of oil, and to that deafness which even for a few moments is by most people angrily resented. It was a strange friendship, almost as strange as the one that subsisted between Basil and Nan, but in both instances it throve apace, and left all the rest of the family, Easter included, altogether out of the running.

It had become the fashion at Penroses, where no privacy of heart was allowed, to speak of Easter and Basil as the Sun and the Moon, because neither at the same time illuminated the social firmament. This mutual avoidance of two such uncommon persons appeared rather to follow the fixed courses of Nature than to arise from any pre-conceived

determination of their own, a variety of causes apparently drawing each out of the other's orbit, however much they might have desired to draw nearer. To drop the metaphor of heavenly bodies, with whomsoever the impulse of avoidance had begun, the other had promptly seconded it, greatly to the satisfaction of Tom Denison who, at odd moments, felt qualms at the ease with which he had admitted an utter stranger to his almost orientally-guarded family life. And he was beginning to resign himself to Jem If Easter were resolved to make a fool of herself by marrying, she might do worse than —Jem—but he swallowed the pill, prospectively, with an exceedingly bad grace.

Hugon had niched herself, and actually inside that charmed circle which Mrs. Denison drew round her own hearth, while she had won Tom's good graces by accompanying him in those constitutionals round the premises that he affected, and listening to his grievances.

Not one of these lolling, lazy creatures, with eyes sharp as needles to everyone's faults but their own, would take any interest in the things that he loved, but only in what immediately concerned themselves, and, as a trifling instance, he could not induce any child of his to love his garden. All the women of Tom's family had been notable gardeners, and it is a fact that let the most discontented, morbid-minded man on earth take earnestly to the gentle art, and his mind and body will begin to be purified, and insensibly he will become wholesome, sound, and happy. Dig in your garden, Mr. or Miss Misanthrope, plant young seedlings, and thrill for joy as you see them growing up; get the fresh scents of the earth into your stale brain, and the healthy juices of Nature into your blood, and you will come to love the breath of the flower you have reared, and to turn constantly from the disappointing page of human nature to those simple pleasures that

insensibly elevate the soul, and bring a profound restfulness and peace not far removed from the ripest philosophy. For such of you there is always a haunt

"Full of soft dreams, and health, and quiet breathing."

Another sore point was, that Tom had come of a family where all the women were born managers, and in his estimation Maria was a Muddler. Unconsciously, I think, the alliteration pleased him—much as if he had found himself talking poetry without having been at any pains to acquire the art. He had very strong opinions about how girls should be brought up, and thought that if they were made to perform house duties, the country would soon be free of the curse and tyranny of servants, but to bring up a lot of boys and girls to dandle round, and order people about, was entirely wrong, for thus they never learned the dignity, the sweetness, and the *rest* of work.

He used to tell Maria that a fine ought to be inflicted on every woman in Great Britain who did not herself know, and teach her daughters, how to cook, and surely he was right.

Learn, and you can talk to your cook, and she will respect you. Complexions may pale, love may dwindle to vanishing point, hope die of inanition, but a well-cooked meal will bring peace to a man's vexed spirit, and dispose him favourably to the person who has ordered it.

It takes a good many trifles to make a man address his wife as "my dear" in a tone that suggests she is anyone's dear rather than his, and it suggests a suspicion, founded on fact, when a wife narrowly scans every female waist that approaches her female circle, lest it prove a temptation to the male eye. Nevertheless, as is usual with people who disagree the most, and are utterly incompatible in their habits and tempers, Tom and Maria rejoiced

in an immense family that throve with amazing success in a more or less tempestuous domestic atmosphere, and in this breezy, open-air life, Hugon, the stranger woman, throve and expanded like a cellar plant set in the eye of the sun, while the very absence of intellectual or introspective life worked on her like a charm, for at Penroses no one thought of picking his soul to pieces, and spotting every dark corner in it (for even Nan could not be called morbid), and the unselfish action, the kind impulse, the right thought, were not exalted into heroism; they came naturally, and passed without comment. In the whole family not a *poseur* was to be found, life there was homogeneous, and not made up of shreds and patches all overshadowed by the dominant "I." And Hugon had actually been persuaded by Easter into a white frock, affording in it another striking proof of how impossible it is for anything young to be really ugly, and in-

deed, away from Easter, she actually achieved distinction.

To please everybody is a sure sign that you must, at some period of your life, have displeased yourself very much, and Basil wondered what manner of man had had the making, or the marring, of her. They were excellent friends, and thoroughly agreed with Solomon that all is vanity, only the man's ungrateful reasons for arriving at this conclusion were because he had had a surfeit of pleasure, while the woman's were the very opposite, because she had never known any at all.

Hugon had clearly never enjoyed herself—*ergo* she must be good—and, indeed, she displayed an antagonistic spirit to the male sex that, in these dog-days, often made her refreshingly acid company.

It is mostly a man who demoralises a woman, because he asks so little of her. She is a "poor little woman," no matter how

wrong, or weak, or silly, but to be really approved by a noble sister-woman means much, and is a crown of glory to her who wins it.

And Easter, whether dodging an insolent Shaver round a tree, or picking currants for preserves, or sitting by her mother's side making those white frills in which her soul delighted, or flouting Jem, or frivoling round with her "Boys," whom she unblushingly hid from the Chief in unlikely places, was alike unapproachable, enchanting, and insultingly fancy-free. At Fairmile, it had never occurred to Basil that there might be a soul and spirit betwixt that exquisite skin of hers —but it did occasionally occur to him now. Easter always running away, Nan nearly always close at hand—never wearying him, but exhaustless as inspired young things are, who give out their very best when young, eager, with all their ideals and passionate hopes new and lusty upon them, they made a

perpetual contrast in his eyes, that gave him keenest pleasure—or he had not lingered.

Yet, if he had known it, the chiefest feeling in Easter's mind was that of smarting, keen humiliation. It is always a ridiculous position, when having brandished your arm, rehearsed effects, and loaded yourself to the muzzle with, "Sir! unhand me! I love you not! Avaunt!" the sir mizzles out at the back door, without ever making love to you at all, and a label of "No Intentions" displayed on his back. A woman is as jealous of her prerogative of saying "No," as a man is of his right to demand "Yes." He knows that in the full ardour of the chase, he is manly, admirable, endowed with every possibility of god-ship, but driven into a corner and courted, he is sulky, undignified, and seldom yields as captive with any attempt at grace. And the greatest joy of a woman's life is yielding — or refusing. There is no finer touch in George Eliot's

delineation of human character than where Gwendolen, though Grandcourt is personally displeasing to her, has no idea of making herself undesirable to him, or outraging his fastidious taste, and so is careful to put the scent he prefers on her handkerchief—even if afterwards she lets him drown before her eyes without making an effort to save him.

Thus Easter, having regarded the right of choice as being solely in her own hands, had been amazed at Basil's tacit withdrawal from his court, and angry that he had not even given her a chance of trying that old and infallible receipt for keeping a man's heart—first make yourself perfectly sweet, then treat him as badly as you know how. And it's a stabbing thought to a lovely young woman that her charms have failed her—call her wicked, call her mad, but to let her see that she has no power over you is perdition, and though it was true Easter had given him no opportunity, the man who is not his own

Providence in such matters is a fool or—unwilling.

And often as Basil now dined of evenings at Penroses, Easter, with one of those small feminine slaps that women love to administer to over-bold, or over-backward swains, never appeared on such occasions, nor was she afterwards to be found in that many-windowed drawing-room upstairs, in whose pale chocolate satin cushions she was fond at other times of burying herself.

And Tom Denison smiled, putting down Easter's eccentricities of conduct to "temper." She was not his child and Maria's for nothing, and the fiery spirit of the one, the gentle obstinacy and grit of the other, united their forces in her, and formed a "kink" by no means easy to unravel. We are all the product of the seeds sown by our ancestors, yet when in our minds or bodies a tendency, a vice, a virtue or a talent appears, we look at it puzzled, and in-

credulous, as if Nature were Art, and trying to make fools of us. A hard ache comes into the knee, a darting pain in the breast, rheumatism, cancer — heredity again; and when some wretched man bursts out into homicidal mania, slaying all upon whom he can lay hands, what is it but the recurring instinct of some fighting ancestor, to whom bloodshed was a trade, and by right of which, every savage, ungovernable instinct of his soul was fully licensed to gratify itself?

So with talent. A mere child takes pen in hand, and describes with startling lucidity and point what it observes and feels—it has been born with the gift of reproduction or expression; another infant seizes pencil and sketches some trifle at sight in absolutely true proportions—it is born with the gift of "form"; some curious difference in its sight to that of others has turned him out an artist whether he will or no. And so on indefinitely, and strong indeed must be the

will that stands up against taints and tendencies as much inwoven with our blood as the freak that is stamped on the butterfly's wing, or the markings in flowers that appear with unswerving fidelity from generation to generation. We cannot alter those markings, but it is in our power to make the evil ones grow fainter, and the strong impulse that may rise in us to crush out all low motives and passions, and live the higher life, may be the original seed of noble deeds and endeavours in our descendants, hundreds of years after we, with all our struggles and tears and failures, are dust. Thus may not the prompting thought to do good, the noble ideal lifting itself clear out of the sloth of dull habit, come to us direct from some earnest soul that has sinned and suffered, yet struggled a step nearer to God than did his predecessor, even as some long past sensual life still has power to throw its slime over us, and strive to hold us back from our

better selves? So in one single human being is represented the influences of the past, the potentialities of the present, and the illimitable responsibilities of the generations yet unborn.

CHAPTER V.

"That which seems obstinacy in some people may appear constancy in others."

—CICERO.

"SHE tells lies," said Melons calmly. "The Chief nearly bowled her out yesterday, and I saw Sweet William, who was handing me the potatoes, give the Snapper a wink."

"His name is William," remonstrated the Ancient Mariner, from the place where she wielded an imaginary *bâton* of authority, "and I must beg of you, Melons, to remember that Cato advises us to think it the first of duties to restrain the tongue, and says he approaches nearest to God who knows when to be silent."

"Didn't somebody say that the old gods were nothing but men and wine? And certainly they did some jolly human things,"

said Melons, whose memory sometimes provided strictly unorthodox scraps of information. "Well, from all *I've* seen of men, they are foolish enough *without* the wine, so I don't think the old boys could have been up to much. And as to the Old Testament worthies, why, ma'am, when I heard you teaching Peggy out of 'Line upon Line' the other day, *your* questions and *her* answers, it curdled my blood. I s'pose when I was young I didn't realize the utter iniquitousness of the doings of the old patriarchs, but now I do, I say it's wicked to hold up such examples to children, and if our kings and queens tried on some of those old patriarchal ways, why, there would be a good many crowns going to avuncular relatives — but they durstn't, and somehow Revolutions ain't *English*."

"Girls," said the Ancient Mariner, horrified, "this is a drawing lesson, not a scandalous dissertation on Man." She spoke respectfully

of the terrible and dangerous creature—possibly she might have displayed less fear, had not her waist been from early youth horrific to the male eye.

"And if the Muscovite were not so cool, his eyes so blue, and his manners so mellifluous," continued Melons, mixing her colours recklessly, "I would back Jem Burghersh in Easter's affections. Jem is much the bigger of the two—and you can always bully a big man, the little man always bullies you. If a little man dared to put his arm round *my* waist, I'd *murder* him!"

"My dear!" ejaculated the scandalised Ancient Mariner.

"Do you suppose I go among poor people for nothing?" enquired Melons; "all big folks are good-hearted and weak-minded, more or less, and they are all managed by the little ones. I'd rather marry ever such a hulking wretch of a man—if he were yards long, than a strutter. You *might* reform a

big man, the little one is certain to try and reform you."

"Basil is not little," objected Nan, with elbows on her drawing board, and earnest eyes looking out of her tangle of red hair.

"Five feet eleven at the outside," said Melons, "but he's got an air and looks more. And I don't believe he ever dreamt of falling in love with Easter—there!"

"Nor Easter with him," cried Nan indignantly.

"Our female Narcissus in love?" said Dinkie, who had come in and caught the last words; "perish the thought! Some things are made to be looked at, others to be eaten—Easter and I belong to the former class. You don't seem very well, ma'am," he said, stooping down to look at the Ancient Mariner who had begun to flap up and down like a barn-door fowl when a fox is around; "hadn't you better rest for an hour?"

He opened the door politely as he spoke,

and the Ancient Mariner took the hint, and dribbled herself out of sight.

"What is the matter with her?" he enquired. "I do believe she has fallen in love with Strokoff! If you look at her she totters, and if you sneeze at her she goes into a hundred pieces!"

"There are people," said Melons, "who lie down flat on their backs and let the clouds roll by—the Mariner is one of them. She has got a bilious attack, and was longing to give way to it—that's all."

"Well," said Dinkie, "she's an interesting relic—the sort of thing you girls may come to if you sit up and behave, and forget everything you've ever learnt, more especially what *I've* taught you. Where's Easter?"

"Making frills, I expect, after sending Jem off to his Pillow of Consolation. The Pillow means to nobble him, I believe, but he don't see it."

"Stuff!" said Dinkie robustly. "Can't any

fool see she is his Pillow of Consolation upon which to lean comfortably, and say all the things about Easter that Easter won't let him say to herself? Jem's too meek by half."

"'A *man*, a spaniel, a walnut tree,
The more you beat 'em the better they be!'"

droned Melons.

"Jealous—jealous again!" said Dinkie aggravatingly, "you'd like to be a man—and you ain't one—that's about the size of it."

"And pray," said Melons, witheringly, "what is there in being a man to be proud of?"

"Lots. Don't the Jews go down on their knees every time they enter their synagogues and say fervently: 'O, Lord God, blessed art thou who has not made me a woman!' Nobody ever heard a man wish himself a female. You've got your advantages, though," he added, magnificently; "you get the wing of a chicken, and the privilege of saying 'No' *when* a man asks you!"

"Selfish pigs," said Melons, "you ask us to please yourselves, not us. The only real advantage you have over us is—your clothes. A woman is handicapped all her life long with hers. A wretched man bawls out when he is going to a dance or dinner: 'Have I a clean shirt?' It is his sole amount of preparation for the most momentous affair—he may have dozens of shirts, he doesn't know—he's on thorns till he *does* know, and if there is one—he's happy. While a woman has to think of a thousand things, and perhaps after all looks a fright. I admit that you are great there, but in nothing else And you have your pockets. I grant you those. It's enough to ruin the temper of any woman to see a man a walking store-cupboard, while she, poor wretch, has only one pocket for everything, and obliged to sit down on that. If a Female had made the universe, Dinkie, things would be pleasanter for women, and they'd be made—different."

"It would be a sweet world to live in, no doubt," said Dinkie meditatively, "and in that case, Melons, perhaps you'd be born—handsomer."

Here the conversation became personal, and scurrilous. You must be graphic or die, in a large family, and when you do get a brief innings, you are a fool if you do not make the most of it. The successful people of the world have mostly, I think, belonged to large families.

"But, console yourself, my Melons," wound up Dinkie. "There are lots of men who wouldn't dare to ask a good-looking woman to marry them who will very likely find courage to ask *you*. Odd—ain't it?—that a fraction too much on your nose or lip—a little colour in the wrong place, and it's ugliness; just the right amount, and in the right place, and it's beauty. And there you are. You needn't even grin unless you like. You give so much pleasure that nobody

wants you to do anything but sit still and be looked at. And you ought to be paid to go out to evening parties, and not even expected to make yourself civil!"

"You speak so feelingly," said Melons, "that one would think you were a beauty yourself. Which you ain't."

Dinkie scowled. He had truculent eyebrows, huge thighs and sinews, and was chiefly remarkable for an agreeable habit of taking his coat off, and asking any male thing he happened to disagree with, to come and have it out round the corner. He was moreover blessed with curly brown hair, and it is just that same curl in the hair which often makes all the difference between an ugly and a pretty girl, or a plain and a good-looking man, though few people know it.

"Just let me catch you purloining things out of my drawers for the Snapper again," he said, "and you'll *hear* of it."

"'The Lord helps those who help them-

selves. Come in and help yourself at *this* store.' That is what an enterprising man posted up outside his shop," said Melons coolly, "and you shouldn't have such a choice assortment of everything if the poor Snapper at a critical period of his career isn't to touch 'em!"

"Who is the new young woman?" said Dinkie, grinning broadly, "four times his own size as usual? Hullo! What makes Nan so jolly white?"

Nan put her hand up to her cheek. "It's—it's chalk. I rubbed my face all over with it before breakfast this morning, just to see if any of you would notice it, and think I looked pale—but nobody even looked at me."

"It's lucky we ain't a kissing lot," said Dinkie grimacing, "and pray what on earth do you *want* people to notice you for? *I'm* only too thankful to be let alone."

Nan sighed, and looked down on her ragged

skirt. There was not a railing in the place that was not adorned by a scrap of her clothing, or a tree she had not climbed, and tumbled out of. Some people are wicked and happy, others are wicked and miserable. Nan belonged to the latter class.

"Dinkie," suddenly screamed out Melons, "there's smoke coming out of your pocket!"

"Must have sat on my lucifers," said Dinkie, turning up the tail of his coat, and calmly crushing its smoking contents.

"The Chief has forbidden you to smoke," said Melons reproachfully, "and everybody knows that smoking leads to drinking——"

"Ho, ho, ho!" said Dinkie, rolling about in an ecstacy of mirth. "What do you think old Shrubsole said to me the other day? I met him with a blue ribbon in his button-hole and enquired what on earth it meant. He said he had joined the army because he thought it must be so *delicious* to be tempted —and to *fall!* Now, for my part I hate

teetotalers, it gives 'em so much more spare limit for getting themselves and other people into mischief. You know he lets out a trap on hire? I asked how many it held. He said: 'Twelve really, but sixteen — *if intimate.*' I say, girls, I believe Bunkulorum's gone a buster on snails again. I found the tool-house door locked just now"—which was a damning fact, as it was here that Bunkulorum had originally been discovered conducting cooking operations over the furnace fire.

In spite of Bunkulorum's quoting hisory, and urging French precedent, he had been politely sent to Coventry, and endowed with the full baptismal name of Shrompy-Snail-broth; no one would kiss him at any price, and the family nose curled at his approach. It is true he had before this showed a tendency to other depraved tastes, such as quoting Shakespeare (which was insulting, as none of the others knew anything about that

gentleman, or wanted to either), and trying superior airs on the strength of his book learning that only came back, like boomerangs in an unskilled hand, to hit him violently on the head.

"O! let him alone," said Melons. "Some people like one thing, some another. You may like something worse some day."

"Precisely, my love. I may even live, when I have made a failure of everything else in life, to make a success of my stomach —as the Ancient Mariner does. Do you observe that Hugon never eats onions? Now a person *can't* be healthy who don't like spring-onions—it may be low, but it's human nature, while your refined person who squirms at the sight of 'em—mark my words," he added, oracularly, "if she hasn't got a history, I'll eat her."

"I'm sorry for her," said Nan. "Her eyes hurt me—somebody must have been awful bad to her to make her look like *that*."

"Hurt herself, you mean," said Dinkie, robustly. "It isn't other people's wrong doings cut you up to that extent—it's your own, and when you begin by being very sorry for a person, you usually end by being sorry for yourself. O! yes, miss, you may scowl, but Hugon's the sort of person you love passionately at a distance—you count up all her good qualities and diligently commit them to memory—and then, the moment you see that person, you go for 'em like a terrier for a rat! You bet there isn't much *she* don't know—and hasn't done. Net result—face like an extinct volcano, no friends, and the post of cudgeller-in-chief of youthful wits at Fairmile. There's something wrong somewhere—then look at her hands! What was she before she became a governess? They're too scarred for even a lady-help—when you're a lady you work so *much* harder than any servant does—but anyway those hands have a history, and you bet they've done some

queer work in their time. And I never could abide an ugly woman."

"She isn't ugly," said Melons, nodding. "If there is ever any question about a woman's ugliness — not of her being a beauty, you may always decide it in the negative. Ugliness—real ugliness—" (unconsciously she looked at Nan) "is so unmistakable you can't misname it. Any apology for it even is thankfully accepted. And Hugon is distinctly interesting—Jem certainly finds her so."

"Jem likes Hugon," said Nan, who always stood up for the absent. "He told me himself he had a very great respect for her."

"When a man has a great respect for a female, that same respect removes her from the category of attractive and marriageable persons," said Dinkie. "But come, Melons, do not, like the blacks at Mandeville who when brought into Court hold a pebble in their mouths, being under the impres-

sion that, so provided, perjury does not count, put a pebble in yours, but tell us honourably how things stand between 'em all?"

But Melons declined to be drawn.

"I never see Easter speak to Basil," she said, "nor he to her."

"He certainly keeps most of his conversation for Nan," said Dinkie, ruminatingly, "though even if she were years older nobody could suspect anyone of being in love with Nan! But I don't think he takes any of us seriously. Penroses is a mere episode to him —no more. And meteors are very beautiful apparitions, no doubt, but the sky stops—and they go. Such men were never intended to marry, my Melons, but to be the joy of the whole female sex. You don't suppose he got those delightful manners of his for nothing, do you? They are a monument raised to the frailty of your sex! But, 'pon my soul, girls, do you know what he and Easter remind

me of? Why" (Dinkie's similes were usually the reverse of elegant) "of two rival stags, equals in beauty, strength and fleetness, who when they meet, toss their heads, paw the ground, snort defiance, then wend their stately way apart, each grandly disdainful of the other. Both Easter and Strokoff want to play first fiddle, and neither means to play second. And woman is a fighting animal, you know—extremely so."

"Man, you mean," said Melons.

"No—woman. The world would be an abode of peace but for woman. She is always fighting for something — for new clothes, or a new man, or power, or out of pure cussedness—but she hardly ever stops still."

"And what about boys?" said Melons with much contempt, "who are insufferably rude to, and secretly jealous of, girls? Well, time mends that, and later on they come very much under the dominion of—girls. At a

still later period, they revert to their original attitude and despise feminines—but you are too young and ignorant, Dinkie, to have got any further than the first stage! And anyway, we can get on without *you*, you can't get on without us. And Easter doesn't *want* Basil."

"Don't you be so sure about that," said Dinkie, nodding, "because one's a work of art, one's apt to think oneself exempt from the common lot, yet the Venus of Milo lost her arms, my children, and a sculptor's joy has before now been seen without her nose! Therefore may Easter yet have to learn a lesson she won't like, for though you may be a goddess on occasion, you've got to be a woman most of your time! And sooner *or* later, according to the Chief's temper, or the length of time that elapses before she feels the joys of our company pall upon her, Easter will appear under the heading of 'Hatches, Matches and Despatches,' and marry Jem."

"Jem isn't half good enough for her," said Nan, with kindling eyes.

"O, yes, he is. There'll be cakes and ale for Jem's wife all the way along—and let us be cheerful or die. It's like a painful, beautiful play—we go and weep at it, but we take jolly good care never to go again! Our Muscovite would see clean through a woman in five minutes and find her sawdust, which is an upsetting process to a goddess, you'll admit, and not at all in Easter's line."

"Basil would make any woman happy whom he loved," cried Nan, in hot indignation.

"And pray, miss," said Dinkie, shooting out his chin aggravatingly at her, "what do *you* know of the points of a good husband? However, in case either of you should ever have a chance of marrying—it isn't likely, but there *are* some fools going about the world—let me give you a few plain hints on making your selection. For a man's birth,

look to his linen and finger nails, and observe the inflections of his voice. For his tastes, study the colour of his ties, the pattern and hang of his trousers, his friends and his rings—if any. For his propensities walk round, and look carefully at the back of his head, and remember, girls, never to marry a man whose neck bulges ever so little over his collar; a man must be a good animal to do his work well, but not too *much* of an animal, or he's a beast. If you want a *successful* man, see that he has a neat foot, he will move quicker, get over obstacles faster than a man who falls over his own toes, and trips up other folks with 'em too. For his breeding, talk sentiment to him when he is starving, and ask him to carry a band-box down the public street when you've just had a row. To test his temper, tell him his nose is a little on one side, and you don't like the way his hair grows—and if *that* won't fetch him, nothing will."

"Easter won't *have* Jem," said Melons sturdily.

"O, yes, she will, she'll climb down—she'll climb down! I defy any girl to live in the country without a lover. How can you look at a blooming old moon all by yourself with nobody to help you count the pimples on it? And what's the good of a haystack without somebody to sit under it with you? And a long lane has a deuced lonely look if someone isn't waiting for you at the corner of it! So you'll see if Easter doesn't out of sheer dulness when Basil's gone, take up with Jem."

"And meanwhile," said Melons, who was nothing if not prosaic, "father has got on his check trousers, and there's a storm in the air."

"Let it blow," said Dinkie, resignedly. "There is an enormous lot to be said in favour of a good bust-up now and then. You should always boil up when you are ready—then you're nicely skimmed, and quite ready

for use when really wanted. In fact, I've come to the conclusion that the healthiest people are those who occasionally let themselves go—they bear no malice—they have pleased themselves, even if they haven't pleased you, cleared the slate of everything in one glorious sweep, and are happy. Now a person stuffed full of silent grievances, and choked indignations, ain't wholesome, he'll get cancer sooner or later if he don't look out—or poison somebody."

"I say!" cried the Snapper, rushing in like a whirlwind, "the Sun and the Moon are actually *talking!* I've *seen* 'em—and if we hide in the shrubbery we'll be able to *hear* 'em too!"

Now Easter, who had been playing croquêt with Jem (having indeed so frank a kindness or contempt for him that she never even took the trouble to avoid his company as she did Basil's), had so lost patience at the way her opponent deliberately spooned her ball into

position, and took all the heart and go out of the game by his pusillanimous neglect of his own interests, and barefaced cheatings on her behalf, that finally she stamped her foot, called him names, and sent him off with that proverbial flea in the ear that all maidens are supposed to keep handy for the lovers who do not please them—even when fleas are not in season—as in March.

Whereupon she went on playing with much satisfaction by herself, for croquêt was a game that commended itself to Easter by reason of its leisurely grace, and pleasant surroundings of cool shadows and heavenly garden scents, just as she loathed lawn tennis for its ungraceful, blowsy ways and extraordinary knack of showing a woman in every respect at her very worst.

She was sauntering, then, to and fro between the long poplar shadows, pitting White against Red, and with fine impartiality essaying the impossible problem of making

both win, when Basil suddenly appeared beside her, as it were, out of the earth, the shrubbery being as bad as a screen from behind which unsuspected and undesired bodies were wont to issue. She shied away from him with a vigour that spoke volumes, but he merely pulled down his waistcoat after the fashion of all well-bred young men when they have a little spare time, and asked if he might have the pleasure of trying to beat her, and looking as if he thoroughly meant it, too.

Easter had always a curiously detached way of looking at, and speaking to, Basil, and to-day it was more marked than usual as she gave the desired permission, and he went off to fish his ball out of the calceolaria bed in which it reposed, hurrying himself in no wise, while she stood looking after him with that deep sense of indignity, almost of brutal ill-treatment that the whole affair had inflicted upon her. For she knew that she was just a *bagatelle*

in this man's life, that mere attraction had brought them together—the sort of thing that makes a woman hate *being* a woman—but that they had never attempted to understand each other as comrades, never met at any one of those thousand *points d'appui* that make a real friendship between a man and a woman, and which must come before love, or comprehension even, if love is to be an abiding guest, and not a sordid lodger. There was no dignity, no comfort whatever, in their relation one to another, and the humiliation the mere sight of him caused her was death to any friendly or natural feeling towards him.

Basil did not play croquêt like Jem—quite the reverse. He was so keen on winning, that he never missed a point in his own favour, and croquêted Easter more spitefully, and sent her farther than she had ever been sent before in her life. In hurrying to pay him out in his own coin she presently struck her ankle violently, thereby realizing how purely

imaginary most of our joys and sorrows really are, since sharp physical pain will put them, and everything else, clean out of our heads.

"I shall have that croquêt over again," she cried, flashing round on him with smarting tears of pain in her eyes, angry with herself too at losing her temper, though when a woman knows herself in the wrong, she usually does something worse to make herself appear better.

Basil made no difficulty, he even pressed the two balls together under her slim foot, and laughed up at her as he kneeled to do it.

"Now don't hit yourself again," he said, with something in his voice that suggested an experience, an ascendancy over women's minds that startled the girl, instantly rousing in her all that was most combative and unyielding.

"I won't take it," she said defiantly, throwing back her head, and while he took her at her word, incidentally observed that

nature had smudged in Easter's eyebrows with *brio*, and at exactly the right angle for expressing all the emotions, tragic, comic, and all the rest of them that a woman could possibly desire to feel—or a man desire to teach her.

From this point he progressed gloriously from hoop to hoop, till he finally hit the stick with a healthy whack that expressed the real good-will with which he beat her. So far, the spies, hidden in the shrubbery, had not been refreshed by those flowers of conversation they expected ; but now, as Easter threw down her mallet and moved towards the house, Basil felt a sudden impulse to detain her. She wore a pink-cotton gown, and I don't believe the devil himself is a match for a woman in a pink gown—it isn't the age of the woman that matters, the color is everything, and for a moment, at least, Easter's pink gown nearly made a fool of Basil.

"Don't you think," he said, pushing back

his straw hat, and coming so near her that the blueness of his eyes, and the clear brown of his skin positively startled her, "that it is rather—warm—to be so bad-tempered?"

It was not warm at all. The delicious coolness of evening was over all, and those scents which refuse to yield themselves to the sun were stealing timidly abroad and falling like benedictions on the air.

Easter laughed. Full of the delightful quality of youth, its freshness, its irresponsibility, above all, its heart-wholeness, was that laugh, and Basil nodded approvingly as he said:

"That's right. I like to hear you laugh. Standing on your dignity pins doesn't suit your style at all—most unbecoming, I assure you."

Shades of Jem! why did not he promptly appear, and trounce this insolent critic? As Easter trembled between astonishment and mirth, for the first time probably in their

lives they looked full and long into each other's faces, and possibly for pure pleasure at what they saw there, smiled.

Maria's voice was heard approaching, the whole garden became suddenly alive, and with a sense of wasted time, and misused energies, Dinkie and the Snapper crawled off their stomachs, and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen garden.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ah! dearest friend, in whom the Gods had joined,
The mildest manners and the bravest mind."

It was quite true, as Melons said, that Jem had sought his Pillow, his confidante, the typical person with two ears and one tongue, whom every man in love hungers for, but seldom finds. When he does, her price is above whatever may be the most fashionable stone of the moment—say chrysophrase, and Jem discovered his in the orchard, stretched his long limbs on the grass beside her, and remained so silent that presently she peeped over, and looked at him.

"What has Easter done *now?*" she enquired.

She had so got that young woman by heart lately (through Jem's reminiscences, and

always eloquent, if somewhat biased, readings of her character) that to talk or think of anything else in his company was almost sacrilegious, and not to be thought of.

"Nothing."

The ball of scarlet silk slipped from her knee; he picked it up and gave it back to her with that gentleness which she had always noted in him, and there is nothing more significant of a man's character than the way in which he takes from, or gives anything to, a woman. Hugon smiled and a dimple shewed in one pale cheek, as though the joy of life in retreating had left a single landmark untouched to show what once had been, and under favourable conditions, might be again, while into her eyes, by almost imperceptible degrees, the color was coming back, even as the green will steal timidly over the burned and blackened hill-side, for Nature is ever repairing man's ravages, if you will only leave everything

to her. When Hugon's eyes met yours, you became aware that they had somehow got the right focus of life, for some eyes look past, over, and to the side of you, others straight through to your very soul, and if you are truly wise, you would rather be severely judged by such eyes than praised by those of a fool.

"He is very good-looking," said Jem, following his own sequence of ideas.

"Very. He has *du charme*, *du charme*, *et toujours du charme.* And he has evidently been used to the best—and therefore the worst—society in the world."

"It is not so much what he says, as what he doesn't say," went on Jem, handsomely, "that makes him interesting, like a book, you know, that is good or bad according to the power of selection possessed by the writer. It only comes out by accident that he has done pretty well everything, and knows everybody worth knowing——"

"Query," said Hugon, drily, "why does he linger at Penroses?"

Jem beamed gloriously—all over.

"It isn't Easter," he said. "She sits upon me, of course, but, bless you, it don't mean anything! Now, Strokoff she positively hates, and he knows it!"

"*Trop de zèle*," murmured Hugon to herself.

"And he'll be off directly," said Jem, with great cheerfulness. "The whole frisky lot is established at Fitzwalters, and any day Hawkhurst may find out he's here—gudgeon-fishing," added Jem, smiling. "Are you quite sure it isn't *you?* because, away from Easter, you know, you're the most attractive woman I ever saw."

It was true. The life-spark once more shone through a body that had long been unresponsive as a waxen image to human emotions, and that highest beauty of all which is often denied to the face on which

the dew of youth and color lies—the beauty of expression—had belonged to Hugon all her life.

"Thank you, Jem," she said, and if you can't call a man by his Christian name when he has been letting daylight into all the chambers of his soul to you for a whole week, why, then you never will, that's all.

"And you're such a good sort. Easter wouldn't have got you down here if you hadn't been."

"I don't know. Most of us are more or less the sport of chance in the objects that interest us, or that we love. Take a toy out of a child's hand, it weeps—but if you replace it with another, the child is happy. The interest or superabundant affection, or whatever else you may call it that must be used up, is satisfied, the means do not signify in the least. And Easter was homesick, so turned to me."

She half put out her hand as if to touch

the nape of his neck, upon which his close-cut curling hair grew in that crinkled point which one never sees in a man who is not nice, and clean, and mostly what a woman loves.

"Only you're so awfully rough on men," said Jem, wheeling round to look at her, "or perhaps it's because you like one man so much, you hate them in the lump. Lots of women do."

"*Like*," she said, under her breath, her face changed swiftly, terribly, and she covered it with her hands.

"I wish," he said, "you'd tell me the story of your life—and trust me."

She took her hands down, and in pity he looked away from what he saw.

"After all," she said, presently, "what does it amount to, all the heaped-up agony, the cries of souls in pain of the whole world? At the worst it is only *one* life, *one* suffering—all the world can give no more than that—one houseless or well-stalled soul, its satis-

faction or its hunger—and in fact you and I, or you and Hodge, represent the whole gamut of human suffering. And when I hear a man is dead, I envy him—he has got his dying over—ours is to come, and the longer you put it off, the worse it is."

"We must die," said Jem, in strongly objecting tones, "but let us *live* first. And if our fears, and terrors, and sufferings are looked into, what are they? A dread of Death to which we are predestined, which is our one big payment for the countless pleasures of life; the fear of losing our money—or not getting enough—of dishonour, of the condemnation of our friends, who are probably committing worse sins than any we have done, and die in the act of judging us. Then there is the loss of those you love by Death, preordained also, for you always knew that they were only lent to you for a time. And it seems to me that we are brought up wrongly, as if death were not, when we should be

taught that we are set as on a great battle-field, full indeed, but in which at each moment a saddle is emptied, in which every brow has the mark of Death upon it, though we cannot see it till a name is called, and then the light flares out, and the man is gone."

Hugon looked down in a strange, absorbed way at her scarred hands. She was thinking that sometimes the life goes out slowly, slowly when it does not want to go. . . .

"And I would teach a child," went on Jem, "from his birth, not to shrink away from and weep over death. It is the surroundings of death, not death itself, that is horrible. What! when the new-born soul is bursting into life, when with it all is movement and activity, for us to be weeping for it, and sorrowing intensely over its exultant freedom? Our mourning is a hopeless denial of our faith. Do we weep to see a rose fall and die? Yet it is death—only it is nature, you say—and is

not *our* death nature? The very eagerness with which we forget, shews how unnatural such mourning and misery are to us who survive. God meant all his families to be happy," concluded Jem, looking rather ashamed of his peroration, "and if we must suffer occasionally, there is only one thing that hurts permanently, and won't heal, and that's sin. Not merely dreamed of, or attempted, but committed—it's the only thing that really *kills*—if repentance or reparation are too late."

"It is too late," she whispered, but he did not hear, her face was grey, but he did not see it. In the distance, and on the higher ground of the garden, he could just see the heads of Basil and Easter passing each other at stately distances in their game, and the phenomenon puzzled him.

"That's odd," he said uneasily. "I wonder what they are talking about?"

"I don't hear them shouting, and they

never get near enough to converse. Where are you going?"

"To—to see which is winning."

"Jem, you're a fool! To have ranged yourself in this short space of time under the heading of the *toujours perdrix* point of view is an imbecility incredible in the man of the world that you ought to be."

> "'For round the world the blade has been
> To see whatever could be seen,
> Returning from his finished tour,
> Grown ten times *duller* than before!'"

quoted Jem, laughing.

"Exactly. A man in love is always dull. That is why Basil remains delightful."

"You seem very fond of him," said Jem grudgingly, "and to have a great deal in common."

"We have, only it's sometimes hard," she went on with apparent irrelevance, "to distinguish between the purity that nobly steps down to vice, and the easy virtue that makes

the sin of a sinner a light thing to one—indeed it's almost impossible to know where toleration ceases to be a Christian virtue, and a base subservience to circumstance steps in. In my limited way I suppose I'm as wicked for a woman as Basil is for a man."

Jem's steadfast eyes met hers full.

"Why do you say these things?" he said coldly. "They are not worthy of you."

His tone hurt her, tears rose to her eyes, and through them looked, for a moment, a hungry soul, that starved in the midst of plenty. Jem's heart smote him, for he had old-fashioned ideas about women, and thought they were meant to be happy, and that it was a man's duty and pleasure to try and make them so.

"I'm a brute," he said, "to forget the old precept, 'Speak gently,' and yet," he went on, penitently, "it is easy enough, if you only think of it, to spare the unkind word—if you'll just remember those you

have lost, whom you would give the world to have back, and be kinder to, then you won't repeat your mistake; but to those who are left, speak gently. They will have many sorrows to bear—especially the young—and one needn't add to them."

The thought ran through her mind of how difficult it would be for a woman to do ill with such a man as this always beside her.

"Jem," she said, "I wish I had been your sister. I should have been proud of you."

"Thank you," he said, then added: "Don't talk to Easter in this way. She is so young, you know—and so happy. And, no matter what the past has been, from prince to peasant, we have all a future, and we can try to live the best that is in us—not taught, not reflected—but *born* in us—overcoming the evil—struggling up incessantly to the light—and so we can't go far wrong, can we?" he added cheerily.

But Hugon sat rigid, and made no reply.

"You'll think I'm turning into a *Pote*," said Jem, "but I've often thought a human life is just like one of those loosely-tied bunches of flowers and waving grasses, meadow sweet, you know, and so on, that please us so much more than the tightly-packed cluster of hot-house blooms. You see, the other is weed and flower—flower and weed—that's just how they grow when Nature is her own bouquet-maker, and it's the same with human nature, the faults set off the virtues, and *vice versâ*. There is a weak spot in the strongest and noblest character, as there is one intrinsic bit of goodness in the vilest, and there is no such thing as a wholly good or wholly bad man or woman, or human nature would be extinct as the dodo."

Hugon did not seem to hear him, she was thinking hard and deep. Presently she said, "Do you think one is justified in slaying a body to save one's soul alive?"

"Not if there is any other way out of it."

"There was no other way."

"My God!" cried Jem in a strong, moved voice. "What have you done?"

She made a gesture as of one who brushes aside a fly.

"Nothing," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

"For they can conquer who believe they can."

THEY were off at last, Tom and Maria sitting up in state before, Hugon and Easter occupying ignominiously enough behind, the seats intended for grooms in the mail phæton, bound for the Hangingshaw, and pursued by the good wishes of the left-behinds of the family, headed by Dinkie, whose final remark, as applied to Easter, was understood to be "Dossy!"

Now one may have some little secret fount of happiness within, that will make one happy sitting in a ditch in a snow storm, and some teasing grievance that makes life unsupportable under the most outwardly favourable conditions, and Easter was not enjoying herself at all as she took the road to that

establishment, all swept and garnished to receive her, to which, in cold blood, she was expected in the course of nature to remove. To marry the first real man who proposes to you—to be blessed and riced—and installed with keys as head upper-servant—O! the deadly dulness of it all, without a spark of originality or devilry in the whole programme!

Tom, too, was irritable (after the manner of fathers and husbands), and crushed Maria's observations, which were well-meant, if devoid of humour, and Tom should have reflected that humour is a two-edged weapon, out of place in the respected mother of a large family.

Hugon was silent, but observed how the horses' swift feet bore them ever towards scenery that grew more and more precipitous and beautiful, so that at one point they went for three miles along a path barely wide enough for their carriage wheels, one side bordered by

rhododendron bushes that, in season, were a blaze of white, and mauve, and vivid rose colour, on the other, by a steep descent that fell sheer away to a valley, its sides clothed with climbing trees, through which the sunlight struggled, playing enchantingly on the boles and mossy green carpet below. Only to just think of what these miles of bloom must be in due season, too much beauty surely for human eye and soul to contain!

They came at last, drawing ever nearer and nearer to the sea, to great wrought iron gates, and saw beyond a lofty archway, a grey old pile nestling at the foot of a cliff, and on the doorstep belonging thereto, Jem Burghersh waiting to receive them.

"Jem," said Easter, forgetting her ill-humour as he lifted her, a mere feather-weight, to the ground, "how you have grown, and how *much* cleaner we both are than when we last adorned this doorstep!"

He did not see Hugon; it was a servant

who assisted her down, and following the others, she stepped alone through the arched doorway, on the very threshold of which she was met by that old-world perfume which clings to some beautiful old houses which have been dwelt in by generation after generation of gently-born, and gently-nurtured men and women. Is it not permissible to think that their good spirits, their gracious influences, yet linger in the air, giving an atmosphere that the newly-built, heavily-stocked house of riches alone, can never by any possibility acquire?

The very servants add their own sober note to the harmony of the whole, and you feel, and know, that nor brains nor education, nor riches in a low-born man, can make up for those centuries of gentle breeding and thousand associations of *entourage* that make the best sort of Englishman what he is.

"A place to live in, to die in, to be good in," thought Hugon, as they passed through

the ante-rooms that led to a vast apartment ceiled and floored with blackest oak, its crimson walls almost entirely panelled with priceless pictures, broken here and there by treasure-filled cabinets, with great windows looking out on different scenes of loveliness, and everywhere flowers—flowers in bowls, in great *cloisonné* jars, in the fire-places — an interior so exquisite, that Hugon moved through it as in an enchanted dream.

Some one had placed an open workbox by a chair that looked like a throne by the hearth, and at which Easter did not even glance, but Hugon's glance embraced everything. In one illuminated moment she saw Easter sitting there, Jem Burghersh's adored wife, and herself as the poor governess, toiling for a crust of bread, cursed by the Furies, and for ever with no ownership in self, but only the blind sport of Fate. A burning sense of the injustice of life, of heaven, ay, and a deeper hurt than these, but newly-

planted there, pierced her very soul, and hearing Basil's voice, who had just arrived, she turned blindly, and stumbled out on to the terrace alone.

> "O, what hills are yon, yon pleasant hills,
> That the sun shines sweetly on?"
> "O, yon are the hills o' heaven," he said,
> "Where you will never win."

They rang in her ears, those hopeless words of warning—where had she heard them, were they written especially for her? And if so, had she not known it all along?

Blindly she gazed around her. The Hangingshaw sat on a natural *plateau* with its feet in a forest, backed by a terraced cliff, and crowned by the moor, from which vantage ground you might see a slender foam-line that marked the breaking of the sea upon the coast about half-a-dozen miles away as the crow flies.

She passed the turning to the trout stream, and by a winding way beneath trees, climbed

upwards to the White Pavilion, otherwise known as the Winter Garden, its many windows open to the air, but guarded by bright awnings, that jealously kept the sun at bay, closing in deep coolness, and soft rocking chairs where one might lie and draw in the voluptuous scent of many flowers, and dream that one had happed on Heaven.

Behind her she heard ascending voices, and without turning, was able to couple them, those of Easter and Basil, of Jem and Maria —all out of tune, save Maria's. Presently those of the latter receded, evidently Mrs. Denison had diverted Jem to the kitchen-garden, and an insane longing suddenly overcame Hugon to follow them. Even as she sternly asked herself what this meant, as a person sickening for fever is still clear enough in reason to recognize his symptoms, Easter ran past her into the pavilion, and throwing herself into a rocking chair at a distance, began to rock herself as if for a wager.

Now, rocking is an insidious, fascinating, greedy sort of occupation, invented by a nation that works harder and lazes harder than any other on earth, and you hate to be disturbed at it, or spoken to, or even looked at, while any attempt to extract an answer from you, begets in your breast an ardent desire to murder that person, and be let alone ever after. Thus Easter, unused to rocking chairs, and in spite of bad temper, began to dream as she swayed softly to and fro, finding nothing to say when the flowers were having their say so deliciously, and being too young to deny herself anything agreeable that offered itself, and lulled by the atmospheric blandishments of the moment, glided sweetly and gradually into the ineffable happiness of sleep.

Hugon had vanished. When the last tap of Easter's little foot ceased, and her curly black eyelashes were sealed to her cheek, Basil took the nearest chair, leaned his elbow on his knee, and quietly studied her.

For a long while he perused the little face, whose tints were not to be matched by a flower there, asking himself whose was the fault, hers or his, that the attraction was not made permanent, that at Fairmile had so powerfully drawn him towards her? Basil knew himself thoroughly; what he could do, and what he could not, and had no intention of giving himself a chance of folly—though probably no man on earth more fully shared those opinions of the ancients as to Beauty being "a delightful prejudice," "a privilege of Nature" . . . "better than all the letters of recommendation in the world" . . . "nothing that was more grateful" . . . while *en revanche* hen-pecked Socrates (you may be sure he deserved his pecking), calls it "a short-lived tyranny"; dry Theophrastus "a silent cheat," while another points sadly to it as "a solitary kingdom." Whatever it might be, here it did not move him—nor had Easter power to make his heart go one

beat the faster for excess of her cruelty, or kindness, or both.

Perhaps the girl's coldness had made his—that if he could have seen her a trembling, loving creature, whose life depended on his smile, he would have grown warm, at least for a time, but the touch had been withheld, and as yet the vital selfishness of love had not stirred him. She was outside his life and personality; she had not hurt him, or pleased him, and a woman must hurt a man deeply, cut into the very quick of him, before she leaves her mark for life and after, upon him. It is impossible to give the highest pleasure where one has not inflicted the keenest suffering, and the gospel of love is nearly always the gospel of pain.

Yet, being a man, Basil would have preferred her indifference not to be as genuine as his. A man hates his little privileges to be intruded on, and if he lives by bread alone, a woman may not live at all—save by his favour.

Yet to Jem, who presently peeped in, there could be no more delectable sight on earth than that of Easter sound asleep, and Basil sitting like a handsome statue of melancholy, looking sadly down at the tesselated pavement, and longing ardently for a smoke. Fitzwalters had expected him long enough—he would go thither to-morrow.

CHAPTER VIII.

"What dupes we are of our desires. . . . Destiny has two ways of crushing us—by refusing our wishes, and fulfilling them. But he who only wills what God wills, escapes both catastrophes. All things work together for his good."

—Amiel.

The reaping of Squire Hussey's ten-acre field of wheat had drawn all the young people out of Penroses, and now, with Jem, and Daddy, and Reggy, and half a score more swains in attendance, Easter's white parasol was bobbing cheerfully along the lanes, the rest of the contingent tailing in a noisy and rabble rout behind her.

Hugon, left behind, like most unwanted things, was not missed at all, when on descending the steep path at the back of the Abbey, that ended in pastures intersected by a trout stream, she stood stock-still to listen to the

rich, soft-toned bells, golden-voiced legacy of those monks who knew how to gather most pleasant things around them, at that moment striking the hour. Delicious bells were they —from their single deep note as of solemn warning, to the hurrying, tumultuous peal that seemed to fall rioting over itself for joy, and clashing and widening till the whole town was full of those echoes—that yet, for all their exultation, breathed a sense of peace and reverence into the quiet air. And yet I never heard that Rokehorne was celebrated for its virtue—only for rack-punch; while the monks—well, when they gave up the pleasures of love, they merely shifted the seat of emotions, substituting another in its place, and perhaps were right, since love is an illusive thing in a man's life, while his dinner mostly comes every day.

The trout stream, like most shallow things, was lovely, a veritable flash of living water, showing light within light, more glorious

than the facets of any earthly diamonds, as it swirled over swaying weeds that looked like flowers in its translucent depths, spreading out their beauties to the water's embrace, as their earthly sisters to the sun, as if they loved it, and apparently Basil loved it too, as he lay, face downward, under the scanty shade of one of those trees that persistently haunt the stream, like lovers the steps of their lady. Indeed it was one of the greatest contradictions of this very twentieth century young man, that fishing should be his favourite sport —an odd taste surely, since it required inexhaustible patience, self-control, a serene love of his own company, and every quality, in short, that hot young blood usually has not.

He was congratulating himself on having escaped the observation of Easter and her merry men, when Hugon came softly, and stood behind him.

"How goes it with thee, O! thou fisher of women?" she said.

He looked up, and did not seem to mind her intrusion on his thoughts. He had indeed, remarked at an early period of their acquaintance, that when talking to her, he always felt he had a bowing acquaintance with the devil, and indeed their conversation was often deficient in clothes, each answering more to the idea that was in the mind of the other, than to the language in which either disguised it.

"I am growing accomplished in country lore," said Hugon, as she sat down beside him. "I have discovered that the crane points out the right time for sowing, the kite for sheep-shearing, and the swallows the exact hour we should put on our summer clothes! Are you consulting the fish as to when you shall set out for Fitzwalters?"

Basil laughed. His voice was delightful, and if indeed it revealed his character, then his mind was to him a kingdom, for by the inflections of a man's voice shall ye know

him—yea, and his friends also. He seemed in no hurry to talk—perhaps he was waiting till a local Chloe and Strephon, undeterred by the heat, or possibly inspired by it, had passed along the footpath, with all that noise and playful violence absolutely indispensable to courtship in the country. Even an arm cannot in rural places slip noiselessly round a waist—that waist must be taken by assault and battery, or it is not worth having, and in fact the more horse-play there is, the more love, and whispered love-vows are things unregistered, and unknown. When Strephon tries to kiss Chloe, she fetches him a mighty blow with her elbow that sends him staggering, murmuring, "Gul'long do!" when she yields up a chaste salute, she first batters his hat in, and it is not until they have knocked each other black and blue, that they arrive at a nice comprehension of each other's feelings, and fully enjoy the sweets of the tender passion.

"If only one could feel like that!" said Basil languidly, as he rolled over on the hot grass, and looked into the water for the shadows—no more—that the lazy fish now and then projected among the flower grasses.

"Console yourself," she said tartly, "for at the rate you have lived, your second childhood will soon arrive, and you will once more enjoy yourself, if you have forgotten all you know."

"Only one can't," said Basil; "one might, if all the books and newspapers in the world were destroyed, and no new ones written, but that infernal printer's ink splashes itself over everything, and the whole earth is one vast sounding board, echoing with all that it is possible for any dead or living man to say, or think. The world wants to be swept clean of voices for awhile, and it would do each of us good to obliterate his own personality, and become a mere nameless atom in the great scheme of creation——"

"Exit Prince Strokoff—enter Adam," said Hugon sceptically, "your world has been well warmed for you, *mon ami*, and on a desert island you would be out of drawing."

"I don't stand out for the island," said Basil, "but I say that the individualism which makes all creation go round self, and stop where *we* stop, is our curse. We show our faces at a window, and think the whole universe comes out to look at us, and stops till we go in again; we paint our wretched Ego in great letters across God's sky, we search for it scrawled in hieroglyphics on the very stones at our feet, the very flowers by the wayside, and the pebbles by the sea-shore—" he paused abruptly to gaze down at a trout's shadow, as if it interested him more than his subject.

"And God," said Hugon below her breath, "what is *He* doing—should we be looking in the emptiness of our own faces, if we could see *His?* If there be a future, why are we

not given some encouragement? It is like a school in which no marks are given, where all our efforts are lost, or if recognised, attributed to false motives, and we come at last to a base acquiescence in circumstances, instead of reaching by sustained and independent upward struggle, the height upon which our hopes are set. Or the world is an ants' nest with all of us hurrying one over one—a hive of drones in which the queen for whom we work is for ever invisible—and from whom no message of praise ever comes! 'Give us a sign,' we cry, but there is no sign. We blame those who shirk work—who will not stoop to pick up the pins that lie in their path, but are not these the truly, only wise who have eyes to see the useless hurly-burly, and how it ends nowhere, and in nothing? Like good housewives, we begin by sewing hooks on our curtains, and gradually progress to safety pins, then we take to merely skewering them up, and find

they do almost as well, and nobody sees the difference—it is only *we* who know how hopelessly we have fallen short. And so," she broke off with a mirthless laugh, "at last one gives up trying to be what one meant to be. It is only by a supreme effort even, that when our grand ones die, we are able to keep the second-rate ones from climbing up, and filling their places. There are those who persuade the world they are great, who dazzle by words, and kindle by their imaginations a flame that very closely resembles the *feu sacré*, who simulate with the wind of their voices the thunder of those mighty voices that roll down the centuries unsilenced, and it requires courage not to be led away, not to be deceived—to hold to your own beliefs through, and in spite of, everything."

Basil nodded, propping up his head on his hands. He was thinking what a lot of words women had for everything, and men only two or three.

"I suppose you'll often come and stop with them at the Hangingshaw?" he said. "I never saw any fellow's future laid out in clearer lines than Burghersh's seems to be—something like a geometrical flower-bed, you know — almost impossible to go wrong, I should say."

"I have always wanted to know," said Hugon, "do you mind telling me? Why you fell in love with Easter at a distance, and out of love with her when you were near?"

Basil tilted his straw hat to the back of his head, and seemed to reflect.

"O! you Russians!" burst out Hugon with great contempt, "your capacity for reflection is illimitable, your power for action —nil."

His face changed to the stern resolved one of a man who can think seriously; ay, and act too, when occasion serves.

"You can't unloose the chains of a country in a moment," he said; "first we must be

taught—we are being taught—to feel, some day we shall do more than suffer—some day——"

He ceased abruptly, and for the first time, Hugon realized that he was a Russian. The flexible curves of his lips fell without effort into rare lines of beauty, and it struck Hugon that Byron had such a mouth when he was young, and his soul was greater than his desires, and there were other lines in Basil's face, whether carved there by his will, or his passions, that no man of character is without, though in his case they rather made, than marred his face. And as if to leave that soul open to all beholders, Basil's dark clear face was perfectly clean shaven, just like a girl's, as Dinkie, who rose early, and toiled late, after a moustache that he had not yet succeeded in catching, was wont sorrowfully to observe.

"And you?" he said abruptly, "what are you, Hugon?"

"'A breakage of Civilization.' I didn't invent the phrase—a millionaire did. Clever, wasn't it? And I ought to plump down on my knees, and say my prayers every day because I'm at Penroses—but I don't. Gratitude! There's no such thing in Nature, and what Nature doesn't know anything about, isn't much worth knowing. She gives and takes freely, she smiles and forgets, or how could she do her work properly? To be grateful is to basely surrender one's independence; it pre-supposes one's dependence on another, and nature revolts at such tyranny; we must love for love's sake, cling for mere clinging's sake, but we cannot keep alive a stale feeling of regard for a kindness that has possibly been undone by subsequent unkindnesses. One must hate with all one's heart, if needs be, with no ropes of gratitude to hold one back. Be grateful by all means *at the time* for a favour bestowed, but having paid the debt, forget it, and let all sense of obligation

cease; don't let it be like the ticket the omnibus conductor gives you in exchange for your penny, and another man comes to *visé*—it's such a lot for a penny! It is with those who never have done, and never will do anything for us, that we are at our very best—our very happiest, and most at ease."

"I like them," said Basil, abruptly, loudly even, "one and all—I like them. Now those pudding basins——"

"*Pudding basins?*" repeated Hugon in amazement.

"Those basins that Mr. Denison fills every day for the poor men and women of the town, before he eats a morsel of dinner himself," said Basil, "they let a whole stream of light into his character. He may have his faults, but to my mind those pudding basins outweigh them all."

"And so," she said slowly, "you can understand and appreciate the humble incident of the poor people's dinners, as well as a character

like Nan's. You keep Pouschkin, Gogol, Belinsky, and Tolstoi for your dessert—you are a man of fashion, a man of pleasure, and you make yourself happy in a family that to you is *bourgeois* simply, and you have not fallen in love with Easter though three parts of you is a slave to woman's beauty! Verily, O! Basil Strokoff, you are a man of parts, and a riddle!"

She looked at him with all a woman's real admiration for the unknown. Like many another she had taken a segment of a man's life, and thought she knew the whole of it . . . for, after all, her experiences were severely limited by the mere fact of *being* a woman.

But Basil always declined to discuss himself —the subject did not interest him, he said, possibly that is why he interested so many other people. The person with the swelled head disgusts all who approach him, and is the original of the classical saw, that he whom

the gods wish to destroy, they first deprive of reason. Yet, when next Basil spoke, it was on a matter that concerned himself.

"Why did she not answer my letters?" he said.

"She did."

Basil started, and a flush showed through his clear brown skin.

"And did the postman deliver them at the wrong address?"

"No. I tore them up. I had—heard of you.

"What did she say in them?"

"Ask her."

"What did I say in mine?"

"Everything that a man of the world should not to a school girl. You have the most immoderate pen, and are the most moderate person in your conduct (at Penroses) I ever knew. What did you mean by them?"

"I haven't the least idea!"

His voice was alert, his languor had all gone, and over his features had spread those bland signs of satisfaction that only a man displays thus artlessly, for I don't think that in a woman's whole range of expression there is any equivalent to the male "smirk."

'Arry wears it broadly, openly, pasturing on his every feature, in the creases of his waistcoat, in the very hang of his coat-tails, my Lord Henry in the deepest depths of his innermost consciousness, but in both it is the manifestation of gratified vanity, and produced only by the pleasing knowledge that each has achieved a signal triumph over one of the opposite sex.

Now a woman may be honestly proud, or honestly angry when a man falls in love with her, but she does not "smirk"—she does not know how. And you never know where a man's "smirk" will end; it is like a stone thrown into a pool—the eddies ripple and widen till something more than a man's

egregious vanity, his *heart* is involved, and often the "smirk" is turned to a wry mouth in bitter earnest, and he ends by cursing the complacent vanity that has lured him on to ruin.

Hugon looked at Basil with pungent contempt, at the pleasure expressed in those close curves of his mouth that were so beautiful, and enigmatical. Jem would have gone mad with joy at the idea of Easter's having loved him if but for an hour, but this man was not thinking of her at all, only of her excellent taste.

"Let us join the merry-makers," he said, jumping up with great alacrity; "those shouts can't be at any very great distance surely. I am going to ask Miss Easter what she said in those letters——"

CHAPTER IX.

"The poetry of earth is never dead ;
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in the cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead."

—KEATS.

NAN had wreathed Easter's swart head with honeysuckle, and of the pink and yellow of the freaked spikes and flowering pollen had made a crown that an Empress might have thrust aside all her jewels to wear, and the reapers paused in their work to look lingeringly at the small oval of the enchanting face, with all that keen appreciation of beauty which such men usually have, and which will not be put off with make-shifts, or airs of fashion—good looks must be genuine, or they are not good looks at all in their estimation, and a common man's summing up of a woman

is worth the thousand wire-drawn conclusions come to by a *raffiné*.

What the latter calls *spirituelle*, charming, and so on (I once heard somebody remark that when you can't say anything else for a woman, you call her elegant), the untaught one, knowing the rules of beauty instinctively, and finding her wanting, calls in good plain English "homely," just as the blindest bat of them all recognises, and is stirred by the sight of real beauty, and is not this love of loveliness, this spontaneous joy in fresh young life, the one scrap of poetry left in us, ever struggling after, and seeking to realize its ideal?

Prone at her feet, and all around her, lay those bold invaders of the field, the Norman poppies, whose scarlet heraldry mocks with its insolence the sweet English pimpernels, the pink convolvuli, and here, too, were sainfoin and blue lucerne, blood-red trefolium, and green white clematis, the last

of the gay vagabond troop that had lovingly waited on the corn's first green shoot above ground to its glorious fall, they decked him even in his dying, for did not they love the grain to which they so lavishly gave their beauty, and did not the corn love them? For the corn is the symbol of stern life, and the flowers and weeds are the lovely frivolities that make the hard reality of existence possible to endure.

Out have leapt the hares from their hiding places, with a better chance of life than the timid field mice who blindly run hither and thither, and the reaping hooks have brought to light nests of helpless young partridges, while afar off the great army of little singing birds who have had such a glorious innings at that bounteous table, look wistfully on at the removal of their feast. They have dipped their beaks in the milky juice of the green corn, they know accurately its every stage till it has hardened into golden grain, they

have tasted it all through, and now sorrowfully, with sad presage of the coming autumn and winter, a shiver runs through their slender bodies even in the sunshine, and Béranger's lines recur involuntarily to the mind, as one watches them flutter restlessly from bough to bough.

All the town seems to have spread itself over the huge field and to find something to do in it, the men to reap, the women to bind, the children and old folks to glean, the oldest Gammer, the youngest toddler, working side by side, being alike in this—to possess just enough strength to pick up a handful of wheat ears with which to totter home; the Gammer just going to learn the great mystery of all things, the tiny child but freshly come from, and still a part of it—at one with Nature and with God.

Into this flood of light and life came Basil and Hugon, and made their way into that corner annexed by the Penroses

contingent, where the fun waxed fast and furious, and each ill-used person strove to forget his own smarts and scratches, by inflicting still deeper ones on his neighbour.

Melons was a sight to behold, so was Nan, the curly red mane of her hair floating out behind like a banner, and shining in the sun like flame. The boys, old and young, Jem included, showing various degrees of injuries, Easter alone displaying no disorder, but only change of colour as Basil approached, while Daddy Gardner, who like most long-nosed people, could be seen laughing or frowning a long way off, scowled down the whole length of his nose as they drew near.

Basil, however, saw only the loveliness of that honeysuckled head, and was trying to adjust himself to the idea that this scornful young Bacchante had once actually written him a love letter. . . . Nay, had even persevered, and repeated the performance

. . . and it is a potent attraction in one who has been invariably cold, to be secretly discovered going to the other extreme, for a man immensely admires in the opposite sex the self-control he so seldom cares to practise himself.

She gave him even colder greeting than usual, but there was something new in his face as he looked at her—almost as if she were a woman, and not a mere work of art warranted to produce satisfaction in the mind of every person who approached her, and it angered, and made her spring up from the four sheaves of wheat that formed her throne, so that down fell her lapful of flowers, attracting a tiny child whose hand was almost too small to hold the ears of corn it carried, and holding on by her skirts, it threw them away, stooping eagerly to gather up the brighter treasures at its feet.

Easter smiled, and stroked fondly the sunny curls at her knee.

"And to think," she said, "that it will grow up into a tiresome Peggy or Bobby one of these days!"

The ebon and fair little head got mixed during the process of picking up the spilled flowers, and Jem's expression as he looked at Easter, opened a door of hell in Hugon's heart, and frightened her. Most of us are capable of heroic deeds *en bloc;* it is the meanness of detail at which we flinch, and few of us can stand slicing to death with the grace and equanimity of a Chinese.

The reapers had paused for tea, and their voices in the soft, incommunicable dialect of Somersetshire rose and fell on the air. Some scraps of their conversation floated to Basil's ears and made him smile, and in the midst of his pre-occupation, he thought what a mistake it was to suppose that country bumpkins were fools.

"Where do you spring from?" said Easter in that natural way belonging to all the

Denisons, and which, in Basil's eyes, constituted their singular charm.

"Hugon found me meditating on my sins and brought me along," he said, watching her as she put up both hands to remove her wreath. "Don't touch it," he added so abruptly that his voice was unconsciously masterful, and she looked at him, the colour wavering in her face, but her eyes did not waver. The others had fallen away, they were virtually alone.

"It looks ridiculous," she said, and tried to free herself, while the flash in his eyes told her that for two pins he would snatch her hands and hold them behind her back.

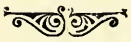
Involuntarily she drew a sharp breath—there is not a woman alive who does not love to be mastered, but by the right man and in the right way—then she tugged at the honeysuckle and only tore her hair.

"Temper again," said Basil coolly, "let me do it"—and he did.

The reapers looked on with a keen sense of satisfaction at the beauty of the picture made by the pair. The factory girls, fingering their sham pearl necklaces sighed, and pushed away the Lubins with whom they had been romping. Jem turned aside and Daddy fairly snorted with disgust, but Nan, drawing near, smiled . . . if only these two became real friends, she would be utterly happy.

"Thank you," said Easter as she turned away.

It was the first gently-spoken word she had ever given him, and he laid the memory of it away with the bit of honeysuckle he presently, and quite openly, placed in his breast pocket.



CHAPTER X.

"God comes to us without bell."

In all Penroses there was only one cool spot, within doors or without, and that was known to only two persons, Dinkie who had originally discovered it, and Nan, to whom he had graciously revealed it under strictest vows of secrecy, and who, so far, had not divulged it. In a large family it does not do to share everything, or there is apt to be very little left for yourself, and Nan was a dangerous sort of person who always wanted to go halves in all pleasures, just as she often refused things she liked, in case somebody else liked them more. But self-sacrifice is the law of some natures, just as it is never even dimly guessed at by others.

"Whew!" said Dinkie, as he locked a door

behind them, and brother and sister plunged straight down into a delicious coldness that was like a deep draught of water to a thirsty soul, "only fancy, if the others found this out! Now don't you go littering the place up with your poetry and stuff, because if the Chief should come down this evening for a bottle of Madeira, and see anything about, there'll be ructions, and I'll never trust you again."

But Nan had brought nothing but herself —chock full of weeds and good intentions as usual, and she sighed as she perched herself on one of the portly casks that lined in seemingly never-ending perspective Mr. Denison's vast wine cellar, while Dinkie selected another, and thrusting his substantial foot in a boot three sizes too big for it through a loop of twine, went vigorously to work on one of those interminable fishing nets that were never known to catch any fish—or so his flattering brethren averred.

Nan sat with thin legs dangling, and having mopped her face with her skirt, looked up through the narrow grating, over which an occasional vagrant step in the street obscured the sunshine that filtered dustily through upon the stone flags below.

Silence is golden, especially when you are in the habit of only being listened to when you have made yourself hoarse by shrieking everybody else down; but too much of anything is apt to pall, and Dinkie presently took his thoughts off his own rather urgent private affairs and looked at Nan.

"Hullo," he said, "what's the matter now? Hatching out a new *Pome?* But look here," he added warningly, "none of that rot, you know, about an ivory arm, a velvet cheek, a marble brow, and a steely eye; I don't admire richly upholstered females myself, and never knew any fellow who did," he added, with the air of one who knew a thing or two, and more on to that.

"N—o," said Nan dejectedly.

"And I should say," went on Dinkie, "that there is nothing more calculated to give a female writer the jim-jams than to see a *man* reading one of her books, and grinning. Most females write at the top of their throats, just you keep somewhere near your boots, Nan, if you want to succeed; only it's so jolly difficult for a woman to be masculine, and if the humour of a book *ain't* masculine—richly masculine—it's poor stuff, very poor stuff," concluded Dinkie, who never read anybody but Fielding, and whose favourite hero was Tom Jones, while, as a real *man*, with no nonsense about him, he respected Bobbie Burns. "And I don't know what you *want* to be a paper-spoiler for," continued Dinkie; "nearly all the trouble in the world, and half the tragedies, come from trying to square the circle, from folks trying to compass the impossible, and do work for which they are not fitted; it isn't the *work* they hate, it's

only that particular kind of work—give them something they *can* do, and they'll do it well and gladly, and be happy. Same with your fancies. Now *you* want to be a poetess—Melons to be a beauty—Bunkulorum to be a Socrates—Easter burns to make a fool of Basil—Hugon wants Jem—the Chief tries to make Mother punctual—Mother, bless her, for all her long seams, and the babies, would like to be a good manager—and even Cookey has her ambitions, and wants to be a tall woman, and when she's out o' Sundays with Joe Stubbs, paws the earth with a stately strut; whereas if you'd only make up your minds to stop, and let other people stop, as Nature made you and them, you'd be content and comfortable—like me."

Nan wriggled uneasily on her iron-cooped seat, then presently unburdened her pressing sorrow.

"Melons is in an awful wopse because I—I boned a new pair of garters she'd put away—

Queen's garters, you know—very grand—*pink*—and when she went to look for them, they were gone. I'd lost one. Then mother's very upset because I wanted a bit of elastic for a catapult the other day, and cut a piece out of her best bonnet, where it fastens on with a button to her head, you know, and when she went to put it on — Oh!" and language failed Nan. "It's because I've been so happy lately, that I'm worse than usual, I s'pose——"

"And then you go down on your bones, you know, and say your prayers, and eat humble pie, and that's rot," said her stern young mentor, "while if you kept out of scrapes you wouldn't want to go asking any favours of anybody."

"No," said Nan, meekly. "But oh! Dinkie, every morning I say to myself: 'Now here's a clean slate, don't you write *anything* on it that isn't good'; but by evening it's all over smudges, and mistakes, and wickedness!"

Dinkie could not follow her here. He made smudges himself sometimes, and rubbed them out quickly, and forgot them. That is the great thing—to rub them out quickly before anybody sees them, and vow you never made them at all. Only Nan was always too ashamed and sorry to attempt to rub out hers, and so with most of us when we are young, we do wrong, we see the huge blots, colossal to our eyes, that disfigure the white page, it can never be clean again, we cry in our agony; once defaced, it is defaced for ever, and a storm of recklessness mingles with our shame and pain, and what matters another blot or two more or less? So we dash in others, and tell our hearts that we do not care. But time goes on; other writing comes on the page—some good, some bad—probably there are even larger blots than those early ones over which we broke our hearts in despair, but if we cover them skilfully, lo! by degrees you see only the writing,

and the blemishes are not so very noticeable after all — and Time, twin-brother with Nature, by degrees obliterates them every one.

"And then," said Dinkie, who was fond of preaching, as we all are, if we can only get any one to listen to us, "it's very funny how you sit down when you've been particularly bad, and write verses about eternity and all that. You don't copy 'em out of anything, do you?" he added suspiciously. "Now, that last rhyme:

> "'Has no strange, beautiful instinct ever
> Strengthened your heart in its fierce endeavour?
> Have you not held back your breath to listen,
> Across your eyes has no earthly glisten?'—

seemed to me jolly fine."

"As if I'd do anything so *mean!* But you don't understand, Dinkie," said poor Nan, secretly overjoyed at his approval.

Dinkie was glad to say he didn't—and in point of fact Dinkie did not understand Nan at all. Every heart has its own Niagara, its

stormy rush, its whirlpools and black depths, but Nan's capacity for despair was quite phenomenal, and altogether beyond the comprehension of Dinkie. Equally so were those fits of crying and passion that were not temper at all, but storms evoked by cruelty, injustice, ridicule, and above all by that unappeasable desire to be loved that is the hallmark of some sensitive souls. But alas! we may earn a bad character very early, and on quite insufficient premises, but it is one that we carry with us to the grave, even though through a lifetime we may have given it the lie.

"You see, Dinkie," said Nan, always anxious to explain, "I think a lot about eternity, because p'raps they won't be as hard on me up top, as you all are down here."

"Oh, that's nonsense," said Dinkie sententiously, "it don't require such a lot of trying, to stick to your garters, and you're so beastly

untidy, Nan, always dropping to pieces everywhere; and a person who flops can never do any good work; their loose bits all come in the way, you know; you must gird up your loins tight, if you mean business. And always see that your hat's of the shiniest and the best—everybody can see that—but who's to know what's inside your cocoanut? And remember that you are received according to your appearance—you are taken leave of according to your deserts. Doesn't some old buffer say that 'Slovenliness is a lazy and beastly negligence of his own person whereby a man becomes so sordid as to be offensive to those about him'?"

"That's a crib," said Nan, indignantly, "a mean crib from Bunkulorum, whom you pretend to despise so much, and *I* think every tub should stand on its *own* bottom, and I wouldn't try and sit on Bunkulorum's if I were *you*. And you ain't any too tidy yourself, either, just look at your boots! Though

I s'pose you can't help having a hoof like an elephant!"

Dinkie coloured violently. The useful size of his feet was a sore point with him; and what member of a big family does not know how to get another member of it on the raw? Looking-glasses are superfluous and you need never labour under the smallest doubts as to the shape of your nose, the exact size of your mouth, or the quality of your skin, when you count your relatives by the dozen.

"Perhaps so, *Miss*," he said vindictively, "but *I* don't go to bed with all my clothes on, or appropriate other people's goods, or *dance* with rage, or stand on my head at unseasonable times, or tell lies——"

Nan flushed and winced as at a spear-thrust.

"I never tell them on my own account," she said, "but only to get somebody else out of scrapes—and of course I get caught——"

"Of course. Now I never tell lies myself

—it don't pay, and it's too much trouble. A liar wants such a thundering long memory, you know——"

"I've often heard you contradict yourself," cried Nan, indignation entirely upsetting her pacific intentions.

"There you go, your lip again, and sitting up on your hind-legs preaching to your elders, one would think you were one of those children who bring their parents up now-a-days—but you don't bring up *me*, miss—not much!"

"But you ain't always right yourself, Dinkie. Didn't you and Daddy Gardner spend the whole of one night seeing each other home, because you were both tight, and each of you was firmly convinced that the other could not take care of himself? And weren't you both found sitting on the same doorstep, arguing it out at five o'clock in the morning, looking regularly deboshed?"

"Men can do as they please, Miss," said

Dinkie, with great majesty, "but girls are expected to *behave*."

"And nobody expects *anything* of boys who do nothing, and get everything in this world," said Nan spitefully. "It takes *you* two hours to learn a punishment chapter in the Bible, *I* can learn it in five minutes."

Dinkie turned up the whites of his eyes appealingly to Heaven. That was the worst of Nan. In the deepest depths of her repentance, out would flash that sharp rapier, her tongue, and cut and stab friend and foe indifferently, though the next moment she was weeping over, and binding up their hurts.

"And pray," he said, looking extremely unpleasant, "how about girls who use bad language? Girls who get into a rage, and call another person a——"

"Oh, stop," cried Nan, putting both hands before her hot face, "*don't* repeat it, Dinkie —don't—I only said it because it was the

very most awful word I knew, or had ever heard of."

"Yes, it was very bad," said Dinkie, with the virtuous air of one who had never done a swear in his life, and was proof against being tempted to. "I often wonder what you're saving up for. With that tongue of yours, you're pretty safe to be murdered by anyone who happened to marry you!"

Nan flushed.

"O! Dinkie," she said, "do you think anybody ever *would?*"

Dinkie grinned, and proceeded with his lecture as though it were a labour of love.

"And then you're so officious, you know, always wanting to be useful, and getting in everybody's way—you mean well, of course, but it ain't dignified, and makes you look awful small—only you can't see it."

This also Nan did not contradict, but if she got well snubbed for her eager helpfulness, for crediting others with noble

thoughts and ideas of which they were quite innocent, methinks such snubs were more to her soul's health than the cheap triumph of those who have gauged human nature all too well and too truly, and who go out of their way to find what they expect.

"And then you're such a profligate—about money, I mean," he added, reflecting that most sinful nouns are masculine in gender. "Why, if you've got a shilling, you chuck it away, and it will be just the same if you ever get thick'uns!"

It is astonishing with what ease we find hard words with which to flagellate other folks' sins, and how squeamishly we select those to characterise our own; how, when Dinkie fooled *his* money away, it was only open-handedness, but in Nan it was a horse of quite another colour.

"I'm very extravagant, and I've got a dreadful temper, I know," began Nan humbly.

"And want of temper is want of pluck," quoted Dinkie, comfortably.

"Oh," cried Nan in a frenzy, "I often wish—I *do* wish I were dead!"

"No, you don't! And your coffin would be sure to be a misfit. Or the last trump would sound directly you had got comfortably settled, and you'd have to get up again —or something."

"Y-e-s. But I should like to be laid out properly. In something becoming, you know, with some flowers in my hands, and in my hair."

This sudden transition from despair to vanity (one of Nan's strongest characteristics) did not astonish Dinkie; he was used to Nan's phases, even if he did not understand them. He used to describe her as a creature of moods and tenses—chiefly intense.

"If you *must* wear anything out of the common," he said, with a grin, "I would suggest a fire-proof garment—it might come

in handy. But you ain't so bad after all," he added encouragingly, "though you'll never be epitaphed as a 'godlie, harmless woman,' you're very forgiving, and that's something. You can't remember injuries, though it's deuced awkward when one has been having an awful row with you one minute, to meet you with *hauteur* the next, and be asked what you mean—because you've forgotten all about it."

"Thank you, Dinkie," said Nan, grateful for that small crumb of praise, and she said it so earnestly that Dinkie repented him of pandering to her love of approbation, and promptly let her know it.

"You're so beastly fond of praise, Nan," he said rebukingly; "that's the worst of a female. She wants to be praised all along the line, or she'll die. Only give her enough butter, and she'll black your boots, sit at home while you kick up your heels abroad with your step-wife, and even cook your

dinner for you if you like at midnight—just for a word of praise. Now, males don't go hungering round for applause and lick it down, and thrive on it, and get downright pretty on it, as a she-thing does. Perhaps it ain't satisfying enough——"

"No," burst out Nan, in spite of herself, "but he'll take a trough-full of flattery, and ask for more! He'll swallow anything—the very grossest you offer. Praise is too delicate a dish to set before a *man!*"

"Well, of all the impudent, disrespectful little devils," began Dinkie, justly enraged, but Nan had got the bit between her teeth, and there was no stopping her till she had raged through a singularly comprehensive vocabulary of abuse, though when she had quite done, and Dinkie's mind was thoroughly impressed with a villainous photograph, in which all his blemishes, physical and mental, were displayed in high relief, and which he was sure did not bear the smallest resemblance

to his own distinguished and attractive self, Nan drowned herself in tears, and passionately entreated him to forgive her, which he flatly and not unnaturally altogether declined to do, even repulsing her damp person with much vigour, when she hurled herself upon him.

"Basil isn't always throwing nasty things up to me, morning, noon and night!" said Nan, when she had retreated to her cask, feeling that tears were a degradation, when nobody begged you to stop.

"He doesn't know you," said Dinkie, convincingly, "*I* do!"

"And it's so nice for *somebody* not to think you a perfect devil," said Nan with a gulp. "It — it makes you one, you know, when everybody says you are. Perhaps that's why I'm not so bad with him as other people," added the child, who already in her gropings after truth had discovered memory to be the real stumbling-block to happiness of the whole human race.

"If your conduct," said Dinkie severely, as he prepared to depart, "is always to depend upon that of other people through life, why, I pity you a *little*, and your family much more. I'm going to play billiards," he added curtly, Nan's remarks about a 'blob nose' and an upper-lip like a clothes-brush still rankling in his mind, "now are you coming, or shall I lock you in for a couple of hours?"

"You'll forget all about me," said Nan. "I'll let you out, and keep the key."

"Very well, only don't go dropping your vile rhymes about borrow and sorrow, kiss and bliss, and all that tommy-rot; remember, if we get bowled out, it'll be *your* doing, and I'll never tell you anything again as long as you live."

Nan accompanied him to the top of the stairs, and let him out with great precaution, but he did not speak to her at departing, so she returned heavy-hearted to her barrel, and producing a startlingly green apple from her

pocket, actually dared to arraign Providence before taking a bite out of it.

"Ain't you *sorry* up there, sometimes," she said, looking reproachfully through the grating as if in search of the Final Cause, "to see everything turn out so wrong down here, when everything was meant to be so right? You must know what I *mean* to do very well, even if I don't do it, and if you gave me a good mark now and then, just to encourage me, I should get on ever so much better, and I'd be so grateful, only whenever I try to be extra good, I'm sure to burst out, and do something ever so much worse than if I hadn't tried at all, so perhaps it's better not to try, but just be moderately wicked every day—only why do you *let* me try, if it's always to be no good?"

She took a meditative bite out of the apple, which was so virulently sour that it made her eyes water, and morally braced her up. Discipline of any kind, even from a sour

apple, is good for us, and Nan felt pounds better as the premonitory pangs of severe stomach-ache set in.

"Now Easter and Basil ain't wicked," she said, doubling herself up in her anguish, "but it's so easy to be good when you're beautiful—it's only ugly people who have ugly feelings—like me."

A light broke over the child's face, and changed its mien as when the sun with its effulgence strikes into sudden glory some distant, lack-lustre field of grain, transmuting it to gold. Easter was the religion of this young life; for all that she lacked, all that in her intense love of the beautiful she would have liked to find in herself, she found in Easter, and worshipped accordingly. And one other person she worshipped—Basil—possibly for much the same reasons. And even when her stomach-ache was gone, she did not feel dull, for she liked to be alone with her soul, which she had not yet overlaid

with swaddlings of millinery, of intrigue, of excitement, and the thousand vices to which grown-up people take like ducks to water. Probably when she grew older, she would hate her soul, and flee from it as a ghost, for is not the great secret of our restlessness, of the ache of life, to be found in our terror of being brought face to face with that *alter ego* which shows so clearly to us its baser one, which we cannot, will not, alter?"

In the midst of Nan's soul-searchings, always earnest, and usually lamentable in results, came a ring overhead at the front-door bell. Basil always rang when he came —it could be no one else, and Nan's heart leaped, and she danced up and down in the dusty motes, had he looked down, he must have seen her.

Sweet William, as usual, lingered, and an idea flashed through Nan's mind. Darting up the stairs, she unlocked the door, and suddenly appeared before Basil, who smiled

down at the little eager face all alive with intelligence in its tangle of bright hair, and laughed when she said in a whisper, drawing him in:

"I'm down in the cellar, Basil. Will you come too?"

He nodded, and she led him carefully through the passage into the darkness. Then, having shut the front door, and guided him down, dusted the top of a cask with her skirt, and spreading out her by no means clean pocket-handkerchief upon it, begged him, in a tone of the greatest hospitality, to be seated.

When he had done so, a lovely pink colour came into Nan's cheeks, and looking at him, so manly and so kind, she felt her heart yearn over him. It is astonishing how soon a woman-child learns this trick of yearning over her brother, her doll, her kitten—anything that fills the clamorous want in her soul. A man may do a yearn occasionally,

but it is mostly against the grain, and he is always ashamed of it afterwards, and extremely shy of doing it again. A woman thrives on it; in fact, the more she does, the more she can do—whereas she had far better smash some crockery, or set to work to dig out a back garden, than indulge in so costly a luxury.

"How cool you are here, Nan," he said, "and what a fine cellar the Chief has," he added, looking down those dim arcades in whose locked recesses were hidden those choice wines scarcely to be matched, certainly not to be beaten, in the county.

"Yes. You won't mind stopping a little bit with me, will you, Basil?" she said timidly, "or hiding behind a barrel if the Chief should come down? because he doesn't know Dinkie's got a key—and if he caught us, there would be a row."

"I'll hide," he said. "Dear little girl," he added heartily, "I always enjoy a talk with

you. What do you do down here all by yourself?"

"Oh, I think, you know."

"And what do you think about?"

She had climbed to up an adjacent barrel, and was gazing at him with intensest appreciation. He was her hero—not like Jem, a mere hourly, every-day article of use like herself, but something out of a book, not to be judged by any common standard, or loved in any way, and she never looked at him without feeling a blessing.

She paused awhile before she said:

"O, about all sorts of things. Souls, you know, and dead people. Basil," she added earnestly, "can you tell me why people look so beautiful and good when they're dead—when the spirit is gone, and so wicked and tired, and cross, when they're alive, and the soul is somewhere inside them? It beats me. A flower doesn't behave like that. All its beauty — but not its scent, which is its

memory, you know—goes when it dies. And I've often thought," she added wistfully (for she had got into the habit of saying things to Basil, things which she never said to anybody else, perhaps because no one would listen to them), "that people's bodies should be able to show the soul shining through—like a tulip, you know, or a buttercup when you hold it up to the light. O, they're both such glories! But I've come to the conclusion that bodies and souls don't work properly together, but nearly always say different things. Mine do. Don't yours, too, sometimes?"

Basil nodded. He thought Nan had hit the right nail on the head, as she nearly always did. Mechanically he felt in his breast-pocket for his cigarette case, and unobserved by Nan in her absorption, lit his cigarette, as he signed encouragingly to her to proceed.

"And it's a wonderful thing, Basil," she

went on, dreamily, "that one flower should be so sweet, and another look just as sweet, and have no scent at all. That you and Easter should be so beautiful, and me so ugly, seems as if God had his favourites, somehow, doesn't it?"

"Yes, but I'm not one of them, child."

But Nan knew better. Nan, whose whole being went out in perception, found beauty everywhere, even in ugly human beings where loveliness was not—for the recognition of it was in herself, and turn where she would, it went with her. Upon whatsoever she looked, she saw the good, not the evil—and lo! the dry rock gushed, and the one speck of goodness in that soul or thing appeared—because she believed it to be there. And if to her was given to see the suffering soul, to *know* what other people only dimly guessed, to read signs of character intuitively, who shall say that such power was a blessing, for is it not usually the lot of those who pour

balm into other folk's wounds to go themselves untended when most utterly in need of cherishing?

She was looking eagerly upwards through the grating, and in this little figure, straining as it were towards the dusty light, there was, to this man of the world, who had known and forgotten so much, something infinitely moving, and even tragic.

This child, always seeking, never finding, always in trouble, more or less misunderstood, a torment to her mother, a riddle to those she most longed to please, had from the first unriddled herself into something beautiful to Basil, perchance as finding in her those same ideals that had haunted his youth, and over paths to which he had lost the route, she had led him back—if but for an hour and day, and made him a better man.

A Russian, for all his English looks, to the core, dreamy, subtle, ardent, religious, and, above all things, receptive, he met and

clasped hands with this child on many points, but most of all in her despair. Only hers was passionately alive, his of that unutterable melancholy which, with the stifled groans of millions of human creatures too courageous to cry out, is breathed into the still air, and over the limitless plains and steppes so unutterably dear and beautiful to the Muscovite soul.

His bent of mind was fatalistic, his religion that of sacrifice and pain, he was pessimist to his finger tips, but outwardly he had not a care, and wore the garment of life so carelessly and well, that none took him for anything but what he appeared—a typical Man of To-day.

But long ago Nan's eyes had pierced the disguise of a mere man of fashion, and what she found beneath the veil she loved, and, in her own way, understood. For dumbly, gropingly, Nan touched the human springs of life, of the heart, even while she left her own

bare and undefended to the careless thrusts of an ignorant world.

"Poor Nan!" he said gently, "your powerful imagination will never let you see people as they really are—only as you wish them to be—and you will suffer horribly before you've done. Try and think of yourself as better, and the rest of us as worse than you suppose us to be."

"Oh, you don't *know* how bad I am," said Nan mournfully. "Just you ask Dinkie! And if you only heard the Words I use——"

"And some day," said Basil, blowing rings of smoke upwards, "you'll look back, and try as you will, you won't be able to recall even an echo of what you feel now. But you won't be the same Nan," he added regretfully, "young, earnest, and believing implicitly in even a rascal like me."

"You mustn't talk like that," she said, looking deeply pained. "If you are not

good, then no one is, or I don't want them to be, either!"

"Nan!" exclaimed Basil quickly, the blood showing through his brown skin, "you make a great mistake about me, I am a regular bad lot. If there is ever any real question of choosing between good and evil, I invariably choose the evil. If I want a thing"—he paused—"really want it, I mean, not merely pretend to (and it's wonderful how often disinclination wears the garb of virtue), I *will* have it, even though I destroy it the next minute."

His eyes flashed with an unholy light, his expression altered entirely, he did not look good at all, even to this child's eyes, and her heart sank.

"I know you are very wilful, Basil," she said sadly.

"No. Unprincipled. I do things that your sister's lover, Burghersh, could never think of doing. The mere thinking of them

proves them wrong. And when the turning point of life comes, I shall take the wrong one. It is such a mistake to think a man will be any different, just because you wish it—what he was, he will be; habit is stronger than enthusiasm with selfish people like me. I'm glad you brought me down here," he added, abruptly, then paused, tormented by Easter. He was in the mood when a man does not know what he wants, and is restless and dissatisfied accordingly. Confound that honeysuckle wreath, he could see and smell it now as Easter bent her head before him, and he disengaged it with swift, firm touches, like a man used to assisting at a woman's toilette. Only there were very few women of his acquaintance, with whose locks he would have dared to meddle. And somehow her submission had mocked him, it was a rebel at heart who dropped him that gentle "Thank you," and turned aside to laugh in

her sleeve, with Daddy for company. And he could not make her look at him. If she had, he would have looked away, that was certain, still——

He shook his head impatiently, and watched the rings of smoke that curled upwards, while Nan, suddenly realizing what they involved, with fascinated eyes, watched them too. The Chief, who was his own butler, would be sure to visit the cellar that evening, and he would smell the smoke, and it would all come out, how Dinkie had found the key, had let her into the secret, who had betrayed it, and—everything.

He glanced at his watch, and threw away his cigarette. "I must be off now, Nan," he said.

"Dinkie says you're going away altogether very soon," said the child wistfully.

"Yes."

"And when will you come back?" Her little face had grown suddenly wan, only now

that he was going, did she realize the amount of happiness, of companionship, he had brought into her life.

"Wherever you are, child," he said, taking the little freckled face in his brown palm, "all your life long, if I'm alive, I will always come to see you."

"And Easter?" she said with some trouble in her voice, that he could not quite understand.

"*Mrs. Burghersh* will have no time to remember me," he said.

"You have not been very kind to her," said Nan sadly, "and I hoped you would be such friends. When she let you take her wreath off the other day, I thought——"

"Well?"

Nan paused. It was so much easier to feel than to speak.

"And you've never come near since, not to speak to her."

"Nan," he said, "if you have found out

anything about me, you've discovered that I'm a coward. When in danger I always—run away."

"Who from?"

"Myself."

"Where to?"

"This time to Fitzwalters."

Nan's face brightened.

"Then you'll come back?" she said, and hugged herself for joy.

"I don't know. '*L'homme propose, et femme dispose.*'"

He turned to go, but Nan stood stock still, looking earnestly at him, that secret "flair" of hers for all human secrets guiding her to the truth—yet not altogether the truth.

"O, Basil," she said with a sort of cry, "why didn't you let Easter alone? You're married, and it's your *wife* you didn't want to go to at Fitzwalters!"

But Basil had passed up the dark stairway, and, opening the door left unlocked in

her excitement by Nan, walked out by that side-exit sacred to tradespeople, postmen, and the unlawful appearances and disappearances incidental to a large family, and vanished.

Whereupon Nan resumed her seat on the top of the cask, covered her head with her skirt, and howled.

It is only the imaginative who troubles to weave ropes out of sand—but when the sand falls in little cones at his feet, the imagination returns, not the poorer, but the richer, to its owner, who begins the whole toil over again—because he must.

CHAPTER XI.

"Ye'll sleep mair in the night, master,
And wake mair in the day;
Gae sooner down to Broomfield Hill,
When ye've sic pranks to play."

THE time was supper. Mrs. Denison had lost her keys, and the domestic weather-chart was marked "stormy." These keys were a perfect farce, being never known to lock up anything that could not be found in great profusion everywhere else (as witness the lost cellar key), but the Chief insisted on them as outward symbols of thrift that when wanted were invariably missing, till, when the house had been thoroughly ransacked, and everybody strung up to a pitch of agony, they were usually found at the bottom of Maria's pocket, to her own perennial astonishment. Whereupon she would heave a sigh of

content, and pursue the even tenor of her way—through her plate.

To-night the Chief was especially out of humour, and a man's temper is a ticklish thing, and once set thoroughly going does not stop in a hurry, as a woman's, from mere force of circumstances, must. Respectable woman is not, in a general way, the destructive animal, man is. She knows the cost of smashed crockery and damaged furniture, and dares not indulge herself; he probably does not know, and certainly does not care, and has a high old time generally as he goes on his devastating way, his family looking on, a mere pulp of quaking apprehension, only too thankful if out of the ruin of everything the domestic tyrant, really pleased with himself, emerges, smiling. A woman wouldn't smile if she had done all these things—she would weep, but it is one of the enormous pulls the male sex has over the female one, that never, under any circumstances, does it hang its

head, or display shame of itself, however flagitious may have been its conduct.

Mr. Denison, then, having helped his family to squalls, also to cold roast beef, was about to attack a slice on his own plate, when a shabby little figure stole out of the shadows, and came close up to her father's side, with the courage of despair.

"Father," she said, in a voice that trembled, "if you should go into the cellar to-night, and smell tobacco-smoke, don't be frightened—it hasn't been burgled—it's—it's only *me*."

Mr. Denison, who in addition to being an angry man, was also a hungry one, glared at the child, whose ugliness was always a direct reflection on himself, then at the Ancient Mariner, who looked about to sink under the table.

"So *this* is the way you look after your pupils, ma'am," he flashed out the more

furiously that to him her meekness was like a red rag to a bull.

"It isn't her fault, father," cried Nan eagerly, "it's only that I'm so wicked . . I found a key that fitted the cellar door, and I go and sit down there sometimes—it's so cool . . and . . and I think . . and smoke."

Dinkie's face was a study, while visions of a door unlocked to all comers, of half-emptied casks, and rifled recesses, flitted before Tom's mind.

"*Can't* you keep a key of any kind, Maria?" he began irritably, and then he happened to look at Nan, and something in her face touched him, and appeased his anger. It occurred to him that she was telling a lie to save Dinkie, of whose little propensities he was well aware, so promptly asked that gentleman why he sat there like a great stuck pig, and let his sister take the blame of his misconduct?

But Dinkie truly enough denied the soft impeachment—he was not such a fool as to smoke in the cellar—no, not he.

"It is nothing to do with Dinkie, father," said Nan, trembling more than ever. "He wasn't there, and he didn't know anything about it—really and truly."

The ring of her voice was sincerity itself, and Dinkie looked at her almost with respect. What a limb she was! And she didn't look a bit sick! She had certainly on *this* occasion proved her rights to be classed as a superior criminal, and he would find it hard work now to keep the upper hand of her.

"There, there," said Mr. Denison, not unkindly, "go to bed," then as she turned away, he drew her towards him, put his arm round her shoulder, and kissed her. After all, she had come straight to him and told the truth; she had not kept him at the polite distance his children usually did — and something tugged at Tom's heart, and brought un-

wonted moisture to his eyes, as he helped himself to pickles with that slice of roast beef from which she had diverted him.

Nan went away on air. The Chief had been kind to her for the first time in her life—and her face still shone radiantly, when some time later Dinkie discovered her, having made quite a toilette, in bed.

"You little idiot," he said, sitting down on her toes, "why didn't you clean up the ashes, and hold your tongue? That was what you were bursting to tell me, I s'pose, on the barrel. Were you sick?"

"N—not very," murmured Nan.

"And just after I'd been talking to you, and encouraging you to be better!" said Dinkie.

"You don't encourage me much, Dinkie," said Nan with a gulp. "I often think you are like the man who administered the last consolations of religion to the other man who was dying— don't you remember?"

"No," said Dinkie, "I don't. One of your old Joe Millers, I s'pose."

"It isn't a Joe anything. It was only a colonel who missed one of his men on parade, and asked the sergeant why he was absent. 'Jones, sir, is dead, sir,' said the sergeant. 'Indeed, and when did that happen?' 'Last night, sir. I was with him, and administered the last consolations of religion.' 'Indeed. What were those?' 'Well, sir, it was this way: "Jones," sez I, "you're wery hill." "Yes," sez 'e. "And Jones," sez I, "you 'as been a wery bad man." "Yes," sez 'e, sorter groanin' like. "And, Jones," sez I, "you're goin' to die." "*Yes!*" sez 'e, groanin' again. "And, Jones," sez I, "you're goin' to 'ell." "*Yes!*" sez 'e, wery 'ang-dog. "And, Jones," sez I, "you ought to be wery pleased, and proud to 'ave a sitivation provided for you free of charge." "Yes," sez 'e, "and then 'e died." And I often think Dinkie, that your encouragements to me

are something like that sergeant's consolations to Jones."

"Well!" said Dinkie, drawing a deep breath, "what with smoking tobacco, and telling ribald stories, and rebuking your elders, I think you're getting along pretty fast for a young woman who is trying above a bit to improve her soul. But what *I* want to know is—where you got that cigarette? The artfulness of keeping it up your sleeve all that time, and pretending you wanted to stop down there to think! Mean, *I* call it!"

But Nan screwed up her mouth tight, and shook her head to signify that horses would not draw a word out of her.

"I don't believe you'd got it when I left," said Dinkie, as he began to unlace his boots preparatory to retiring, "you'd have told me what you were going to do, or bust."

But Nan containing herself by supremest effort, Dinkie tried strategy.

"What might you happen to be talking

about?" he said insinuatingly, "when you committed such a suicidal act as smoking in the cellar, of all earthly places?"

"Souls," said Nan abstractedly, and quite off her guard.

"So exactly like you," said Dinkie, "gasing about your immortal soul, and getting your vile body into trouble all the time. And pray, who were you talking to? Now, if it had been Peggy, it might have been a beau—but nobody could suspect *you*."

But Nan was on the alert now, and not to be drawn.

"Well," said Dinkie, decidedly huffed, "I'm glad you had the grace to keep *me* out of it, anyway," and picking up his boots, he departed with an ostentatious absence of leave-taking that, under the circumstances, Nan felt to be the height of cruelty.

After the Ancient Mariner had flapped round, and rebuked her after what Dinkie called a tadpole fashion (he had finally

decided that she was a tadpole, not an oyster, as an oyster, if no joy to himself, gives pleasure to somebody else), Easter came and sat down, a slim, young shape in a black grenadine gown with only the white of her neck and arms showing through. Black, for the black-velvet-eyed, black-haired women, white or the nearest colours to white for the fair-skinned ones, thus have Nature and Art decreed, no matter how the mantua-makers may step in to spoil their dictates.

"Nan," said Easter without preamble, "it was Basil Strokoff who smoked in the cellar this afternoon. Did he talk about *me?*"

"Not much. You—you ain't in love with Basil, are you?"

"No. Why?"

"Because I think he's married."

Easter turned her face away. Nan could make nothing of her attitude, but thought she suffered.

"Did he come to tell you that?"

"He didn't tell me, I guessed it. You see a man like Basil wouldn't be *let* stop single, so of course" (Nan lowered her voice), "he didn't dare to fall in love with you."

"I didn't know that being married made much difference to men of that sort."

"Oh, Easter!"

"And he is too well-behaved for a married man. And too original and unbroken—he is no more married than I am. Good-night, child, I'm going—out for a walk."

"The garden, you mean?"

"Too small. I'm going over the hills and far away. The house stifles me to-night, and everybody is dull as ditch-water, and there are too many of us. We want a plague to take away half the people, then the other half could breathe."

"God bless you, Easter," cried Nan after her as she went out.

"That's a queer child," Mr. Denison was saying as he and Maria sat alone in the

Green-room together. Tobacco is soothing, so is whisky and water, when taken in quantities of neither too much, nor too little, and having, like most hasty-tempered men, a blessedly short memory, Tom had by now quite forgotten his recent irritation, and that good old blister, Maria's keys. "It's my belief she's got all the brains of the family."

Maria sniffed. She was not imaginative—women who bring large families into the world seldom are, and if she could have *seen* Nan's shivering, naked, inner self, with its many needs and sorrows, she would have tried to make it comfortable as assiduously as she did Nan's body, but she did not see it, only the child's wild ways, and impossible temperament. She was, moreover, pre-occupied, having just before supper discovered a gallon jar that should have been full of pickled walnuts, empty, and her faculties were now fully employed in trying to fix on the thief, to such trifles may souls

sink (so remote) when pickled walnuts vanish (that were so near). And when, putting aside the subject that interested Tom, Mrs. Denison unfolded her grievance, Tom briefly consigned the stolen walnuts and the villain who stole them to a warm place, this, as Maria justly and indignantly observed, did not restore the walnuts to the person who had been at the trouble of pickling them.

Easter heard their dissenting voices as she stole past the open windows, quite unseen, for it was one of those few dark nights of full summer, when the sickle-shaped moon has little power, and a soft, almost impenetrable gloom prevailed in which it was more easy to feel than to see anything very clearly.

Her spirits rose as she left the garden behind, and plunged into the orchard, for Nature ever bears the full half of every burden you take to her, and a wild sense of freedom, of belonging only to herself, made the girl's feet light as air, and so swift that she

passed like a soft rush of wind someone in the very act of striking a match whose light flashed on her face, her beauty seeming to divide the darkness as she went by.

"Daddy," she said to herself angrily, for Daddy had been a nuisance lately, and now he had turned up to spoil her pleasure, for she felt rather than heard him tracking her, and resolved to lead him a real good dance, and then the thought of that long promontory, his nose, colliding with a tree tickled her, and she laughed, laughed almost into the ear of someone who was nearer than she supposed, and who took that smothered laughter as a recognition of his identity, and a direct challenge to go on pursuing, until he caught her.

And if she wanted a game of Bo-peep, well, she should have it. Still this was a new reading of her character, though he knew that it is only the unexpected that happens—with a woman.

The game proceeded on both sides with

verve and subtlety. To the girl it was a frolic, to the man it shewed as an indiscretion, and in the worst possible taste, but soon he warmed to his work, and gradually there woke in him that instinct of the hunter which is the most dominant of all instincts in the male breast, and that once kindled will not be turned aside, or quenched, till gratified, though when he has caught it, when he has seized the bleeding, still quivering thing, what then? His rage, his lust for it is appeased—it goes into his bag, and is forgotten.

Still, for the quarry that escapes, there is pastime, too; and who shall say that it does not enjoy something of the excitement, the hazards, above all, the *life* that beyond any other is comprised in the thing we call sport? Be sure that the hunted exults in confounding the hunter, and mocks at the futile efforts made to seize it, and that when at last it creeps trembling into safety, it yet tingles with the thought of those fierce, burning

moments of pursuit, in which it realised what life was, and clung to, and saved it.

Once a fold of Easter's gown slipped through Basil's fingers, anon his hand touched hers, and occasionally he heard her laughing softly, as in purest enjoyment at his expense, and if he were light of foot, and keen of ear, as all born hunters are, she was quicker, moreover, she was on her own ground, and knew every yard of the place, which he did not.

More than once they felt each other's breath upon their faces, and occasionally she stood motionless, and he passed her for a tree; again, he clasped a slender trunk thinking that he had her, and once she dropped like a stone when he must have seized her, and he fell head foremost over her body, but she was up and away before he had even regained his feet, and he struck himself more than one blow, but did not pause to heed them. The timid night animals were all as still as mice, they knew well enough when

their enemy, man, was abroad, and hid themselves away, and listened, and wondered what it all meant, and did their nibbling furtively.

Presently Basil stumbled over some small thing—surely put there on purpose to trip him up—it was a black satin slipper, and as he hurled it from him, he swore, and that swear nearly lost Easter the game, for the voice was not Daddy's, and a cold chill ran through her as she realised that she had been playing a housemaid's game of Touch-last with—Basil.

Where was her courage that she could not shout out, "Fen! I thought you were Daddy Gardner"? Instead, she escaped barely in time, for the fever was now in her blood; some of his fury had communicated itself to her, and she would *die* before he should catch her, and then she could have killed him, he did so mean a thing. He struck a match, and so revealed her—no angel, but a creature full of

the wine of life, of scorn, of provocation, her dazzling bloom painted on the darkness of the night, and the next moment swallowed up in it, as she fiercely struck the light from his hand, and was gone.

She had been gradually drawing him off towards that end of the orchard which terminated in a wall in which was a postern door, usually kept locked by the gardener against little marauders, and what if it were locked to-night? A dash across the open, a door-handle that — thank God! — turned, and Easter was inside it, and had dashed it in the face of her pursuer before he was even aware that she had escaped him.

Quivering, breathless, less triumphant perhaps than she had expected to be, Easter drew the bolt and fell in a heap on the ground, while on the other side, baffled and furious, Basil listened to his own thundering heart-beats, and cursed all women great and small.

He might easily have climbed the wall,

aided by the walnut tree's friendly bough, but he did not, and Easter going laggingly away thought, with a curious fear and longing, how sweet it would be if he had come over—and made her—*made* her—love him.

CHAPTER XII.

"Wouldst thou run
And tempt a fate which prudence bids thee shun?"

It requires some nerve to call on a young woman whom you have chivied round her own orchard like any housemaid overnight, but Basil did not seem to find it a difficult feat, his only trouble was to catch the person to whom he desired to make his apology, and who declined to be caught, so that now, after lingering to the last moment, he had departed.

"He's a *silent* chap!" said Dinkie, who had come up to tell Easter the coast was clear. "I asked him the other day why he'd got a prince's crown on the backs of his hair-brushes and all that sort of thing—O, Lord! his dressing-table is like what a woman's ought to be—and he just stared at me, and lit

a cigar. While as to his bags—it's sinful, just sinful, to see half a hundred pair wasting their sweetness on hooks, while *I've* only got three, and all their seats more or less gone wrong! I've found out who the swell was that came with him, and convulsed the town by his elegance and strict incognito—it was Strokoff's valet, and he packed him back to Town the Monday after he came. But the cat's out of the bag, at last, and I doubt if you see much more of His Serene Highness, Prince Strokoff. He's bowled out, caught, nobbled, and he don't like it either, or dumb swearing's gone out of fashion."

"What *do* you mean?" cried Easter, facing round abruptly.

"Well, Strokoff and I were toddling down the street yesterday afternoon when Lord Hawkhurst drove past, and when he saw Strokoff, he pulled up so sharp as nearly to upset the apple-cart, and said, just as if he saw a Spook:

"'Good God! Strokoff, where do you spring from? We've been expecting you this fortnight!'

"Basil said he was coming over in a few days, just then he was busy gudgeon-fishing. Hawkhurst stared, winked, thought a bit, then asked who he knew in this God-forsaken hole? Basil mentioned the Chief.

"'Denison?' said Hawkhurst, 'the hardest rider in the county, has the prettiest daughter, and who makes a big fortune out of chair-bottoms?'

"'Just so,' said Basil, in his cool way. 'Let me introduce his son.' And he did.

"'You'll excuse me, m' lud,' I said, making my best bow"—and Dinkie tilted his impudent nose to its highest point of impudence—"'but it's 'oss-'air chair bottoms, not cane. Father's keeping the re-seating of old chairs by the wayside for the luxury of his old age!' Strokoff laughed, and I bolted, but I saw Strokoff shake his head, and look riled,

and Hawkhurst passed me afterwards looking disgusted. Shouldn't wonder if there's a petticoat in the case," added Dinkie shrewdly, as he rummaged in Easter's work-basket for a bit of wax he wanted. "There's some other attraction, you bet, besides Hawkhurst at Fitzwalters, and just you see, if she don't turn up here pretty soon."

"His wife, perhaps," said Easter, thinking of Nan's words.

"Fudge! Basil ain't a marrying sort. Look at his waistcoats! Did you ever see a married man's waistcoats sit like his? And there ain't a blooming wrinkle in his forehead, that's where marriage as a failure scores. I expect," added Dinkie, with a grin, "there'll be some pretty deep ones in Jem's before he's many years older!" And with this parting compliment to his sister, vanished.

Easter walked up to her looking-glass, and studied what she saw there.

Sometimes nature only whispers, and you

may feign not to hear her, sometimes she shouts, and you must hearken, ay, and obey her too. She was only whispering to Easter now, who knew well enough that to fall in love with Basil would be utter madness, and that she must escape swiftly before the fire had seized, and shrivelled her into nothing. . . . she would not abandon herself to the warmth, the thrill, the delicious intoxication which was beginning to steal over her—to this new, sweet fever that was creeping through her veins—and if she had power to subdue it, if she could reason thus over it, had love the divine really touched her? I trow not. He takes us unawares, and strikes us mute, helpless, for we cannot flee away from him, however much we would, and if but the fluttering of his wings warn us of his approach, then he is not love, but love's step-brother, yet will the mime show often like reality, when jealousy of "the other woman" skewers a proud heart through and

through, inflicting as deep a wound and harder of healing, as if love himself had done his very worst and best.

What was she like, this Fitzwalters woman—to whom Basil had been on his way when for a mere whim he had dropped in to pay a morning call at Penroses, and stayed?

The Hawkhurst set was notorious in the county for its fast London contingent, in which the only recognised duty in life was —to conjugate the verb "to amuse" in its every tense, always forgetting the past participle, and never pulling up short for anything but that one colossal mistake in the human world's creation—pain.

Basil belonged to that set. His manners, his ways, the nothings that go to make up a man of style and note—all pointed to a world to which he would drift naturally, and Penroses would know him no more.

She turned angrily away from her own reflection, and went downstairs, and out into

the garden, where she presently stumbled upon Hugon, sitting under the copper beech, doing some plain needlework for Maria, and for awhile lay flat on her back, her eyes mounting, and seemingly bent on exploring the endless vistas of leaves overhead.

"Why can't we have pointed roofs instead of ugly flat white ceilings to our houses?" she said discontentedly, "like the old English folk, who, if they could not get arched roofs, loved to make them pointed, with polished timber beams on which their eyes rested, as if looking upwards through a tree? It was about the only comfort they *had* got, when they left their beloved forests, and were obliged to suffocate within four walls. Do you know, Hugon, I often wish I had been born a gipsy, and had to *steal* my supper, before eating and cooking it? It would give it such a flavour!"

"You would make some one else steal it for you," said Hugon.

"Can you tell me," said Easter, abruptly, "why good-looking people mostly make such muddles of their lives? Why having a face that should bring love, usually makes you signally unlucky?"

"I suppose because the prettiest woman usually attracts the worst type of man. He loves her for her beauty—he wants that, and no more—her heart, her understanding, her charms of character go for nothing; he has not looked for, he does not even want to see them. So when he has got tired of the pretty face, naturally he deserts it, and it's a fact that men with ugly wives are invariably more moral than those with handsome ones. The man who never looks beyond the tip of his wife's unsatisfactory nose is safe, beauty won't tempt him an inch, indeed, beauty rather shocks him, and he averts his eyes when he meets it as something dangerous, he has got used to his homely food, and can't properly assimilate a more tempting

diet. It's the men with good-looking wives who are always getting into scrapes; they've got their eye in for beauty, and the more they have, the more they want; so that the every-day companionship of beauty enervates and makes them good for nothing. And taking it all round, it's the plain women who get the plums of life, not the beauties. Your dowdy woman is usually much more devotedly loved than your fresh one, and why? Because she's better-tempered—because she doesn't flirt—and a man likes to fill all a woman's horizon with his own ugly phiz; because beauty is an elegant superfluity, while ugliness populates at least three parts of the world!"

"It's very rough on the pretty ones," said Easter, gravely. "You seem to know a lot about men, Hugon, and I think you've been the victim of one of them—or you wouldn't be so wise. It's only those who have worn the thumbscrew who know how to fit it on

other people's thumbs! And talk about finding a woman at the top of every staircase; it strikes me there's always a man at the bottom! What was he like?"

Hugon closed her eyes. She saw a bearded face, warm with the warmth of a sleek animal that exhaled health and vigour, bland with the pagan sensuousness of an easy humanity, and a luxury-loving nature that denied itself nothing, and for whom in its desires, the barriers between right and wrong simply did not exist. A man to envelope a woman with his big, strong personality, to be gentle with her, to make her like unto himself, and drag her soul down unto hell.

"I understand now why you were so snippy about those letters at Fairmile," said Easter, sitting erect. "I wish I'd got Basil's. Oh!" she drew in her breath sharply, "he would be a demon lover, and make all others tame—it would be like playing with tiger-pups, and then putting up with spaniels——"

"I shouldn't exactly compare Jem to a spaniel," said Hugon drily, "or Basil to a tiger-pup. His play would be of a sterner kind—more like his full-grown papa's, for instance — and I should say his heart was one of many chambers, and that they are mostly full."

"Very likely. But no woman wants what no other woman wants. Some men are costly—like women—but one doesn't grudge the price. I hate cheap things. But there is no price that would buy Basil Strokoff."

Hugon looked up.

"So you have found that out," she said. "Yet you were angry with me at Fairmile."

"How did you come to understand him so well?" said Easter.

"I don't understand him now. A man can thoroughly understand a man, and a woman a woman, but not a man a woman, or a woman a man. A male child of two will understand his father better than his mother

ever can, and a girl child knows what her mother feels, without a word being spoken. I think it's beautiful—the silent comprehension and sympathy between men—without a word, scarcely a look even—it is given and received in silence, but each *knows*."

"The man who controls himself, controls others," said Easter, following her own train of thought, "and I should like to be mastered."

"But not broken," said Hugon. "It would not suit you at all, Essie. And Basil will never break any woman—for he will never marry. He is too sensible of the powder in the jam, too profoundly versed in his own character to commit such suicide. As a good citizen, he ought, of course, to scorn other people's experience, and make a fool of himself, and suffer as severely as the rest; but he has gone round to the other side of the hedge, examined it well, returned to the front, and never found courage—to leap. Now Jem——"

"Jem," said Easter tartly, "had far better take a leaf out of Basil's book. He thinks he has only got to marry a woman to make her happy—doubts on that point don't incommode him in the least. Basil has qualms."

"Jem is sure of himself—Basil isn't."

"Oh! how dull—how deadly dull," burst out Easter passionately, "to live with a man who is always sure of himself—and of—of *you!* Does Nature produce one flower, one fruit, then become barren? Each one bears in it the seeds of another—and you will go on loving, if the power of love be in you, till you die. The real English of a woman's life-long faithfulness to one man is that no second man has come along strong and resolute enough to efface that first impression with his own, and dislodge that lifeless fetish from her bosom—she has never loved at all, if she is not able to love again—and better. Why do you stare at me? I am eighteen years old.

Do you suppose I have never *thought?* And I can feel too. And I say it's the law of all healthy humans to constantly change their opinions—and their hearts too—as circumstances compel them."

"I should advise you, Easter, not to marry."

"I wouldn't—if I were a man. What is marriage? Because you long for a draught of water on a hot day, do you always want water? — or you are famishing, your life depends on a crust of bread, but will you always be hungry? You say yourself that no man should marry—and I say that all women must."

"Poor Jem!" said Hugon bitterly.

"Yes—he'll want all your pity. But he'll be very happy all the same!"

END OF VOL I.